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What is ecclesiology about? The provenance and prospects of recent concrete approaches to ecclesiology.

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Abstract

Over the last fifteen years, a small group of ecclesialogists has been engaged in redefining the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. These 'concrete' ecclesialogies take the historical, sinful, concrete church of experience as the object of their theological reflection, and understand ecclesiological reflection as practical reasoning in the service of church communities. Concrete ecclesialogies borrow methods from qualitative social science in order to attend to the concrete church.

This thesis describes concrete ecclesialogies as a distinct field for the first time, defines the methodological common sense they share, and traces their roots in twentieth century theology and the postmodern cultural context. The theological and methodological tensions underlying concrete ecclesialogies are analysed, and critical attention is focussed on their use of social science. This critical analysis suggests that significant reparative work is needed in order to realise the promise of concrete approaches to ecclesiology. Constructive ethnographic and theological work is required to develop concrete ecclesialogies' understandings of (a) the object of ethnographic inquiry, (b) the object of ecclesiological inquiry, and (c) the function of ecclesiological reflection.

Constructive work commences with a survey of ethnographic understandings of the social real. Pragmatic/relational anthropology's understanding of the social real is used as the departure point for a creative theological rethinking of the object of ecclesiological inquiry, the church, and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for another degree or professional qualification. The thesis is approximately 84,000 words long.

Theodora L Hawksley 5th April 2012

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Reference Notes

A number of the texts consulted in the writing of this thesis have their own particular referencing conventions.

1. Works by Wittgenstein that are organised into separately numbered paragraphs, e.g. *Zettel*, *Philosophical Remarks* and the first part of the *Philosophical Investigations* are cited by paragraph number (§). The second part of the *Investigations* and the *Blue and Brown Books* are cited by page number. As the referencing style I use throughout the thesis does not employ 'p.' or 'pp.' to indicate page numbers, a page reference to the second part of the *Investigations* will be indicated by the lack of a preceding paragraph marker (§). Thus the reference *Investigations* §23, 192 is a reference to paragraph 23 and page 192; the reference §123, §192 denotes paragraphs 123 and 192. In chapter four, where references to Wittgenstein are more frequent, I use the customary abbreviations for his work, which are listed in footnote 394.
2. The journal *Current Anthropology* publishes papers together with responses to the paper from other authors. I cite these as part of the original article, rather than as separate articles, but indicate the name of the commenting author and the inclusive pagination of their response.
3. A number of the papers to which I refer are unpublished conference papers. The page numbers in these citations refer to pages in the typescript. Some of these papers, given at the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network conferences, are forthcoming in two volumes in the 'Ecclesiology and Ethnography' series from William B. Eerdmans, with projected publication dates of Spring and Autumn 2012.
4. Papal encyclicals are referred to by paragraph number (§).
5. All quotations from the Bible are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

Introduction

1. *What's ecclesiology about?*

‘Quite often, at dinner parties and so on, people ask you, ‘Well, what’s jurisprudence about?’, to which the answer is, ‘It’s the law, stupid!’ or, perhaps more politely, ‘Just law’.’¹

What’s ecclesiology about? The legal philosopher Neil MacCormick was often asked a similar question at dinner parties about his own field: ‘Well, what’s jurisprudence *about?*’ He suggested the answer, ‘It’s the law, stupid!’, and perhaps we could answer the question ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’ in the same way: ‘It’s the church, stupid!’ Yet, with jurisprudence as with ecclesiology, the answer is not as simple as the question.

What *is* ecclesiology about, then? Part of the difficulty here is working out what the question is asking. On one hand, it could be a question about the nature of ecclesiology’s object of inquiry; on the other, it could be a question about the purpose and function of ecclesiological reflection. If we hear the question as ‘What’s ecclesiology *about?*’ then answering it will mean giving an account of the nature of the church. If we hear the question as ‘What’s *ecclesiology* about?’ then answering it will mean giving an account of the purpose of theological reflection on the church.

This thesis is concerned with the simple question, ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’, and with the answers it requires. Christian theological reflection over the centuries has produced a range of different answers about the nature of the church and the purpose of theological reflection on it; my particular interest in this thesis is in the new and

¹ Neil MacCormick, ‘Valedictory Lecture: ‘Just Law’,’ (2008) Podcast available from http://law-srv0.law.ed.ac.uk/media/42_professorneilmcormacksvalidictorylecture.mp3 (Accessed July 12th 2011).

different understandings that have begun to emerge in Europe and North America over the last thirty years. During this period, theologians have returned to the question ‘What is ecclesiology about?’, and begun to answer it in new and interesting ways. First, they have begun to rethink the *object* of ecclesiological inquiry, arguing that ecclesiology should be principally concerned not with the ideal, abstract, invisible church of faith, but with the real, historical, sinful, concrete church of experience.² Second, they have also begun to reshape the *purpose* of ecclesiology around the concrete church, suggesting that ecclesiology should be primarily a form of practical reasoning, whose purpose is to help churches become more faithful to their Lord.³ These theologians come from a variety of different theological and confessional backgrounds. They are united not by substantive theological agreement, nor by a clear sense of themselves as a movement, but by what I will describe as a *methodological common sense*: a shared sense of what ecclesiology should attend to and how it should be undertaken.⁴ They are united by the twofold conviction that the ordinary, messy, sinful church of our experience is also the place of our graced encounter with God and hence worthy of theological attention, and that engaging with the methods of social science can help ecclesiologists attend to that concrete church.

² ‘The primary object of ecclesiology is the historical organization that has a historical life; to understand it, one must attend to it.’ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History Vol. 1: Historical Ecclesiology* (London: Continuum, 2004) 4. For Healy’s definition of the concrete church see Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 4–5. For Jenkins’ articulation of the need to attend to the concrete church, see Michael Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death: Ecclesiology in a Postmodern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 73.

³ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 46.

⁴ Jonas Ideström writes, ‘The reflections [of this book] do not start from agreement on a common ecclesiology but from a common interest in doing ecclesiology based on concrete manifestations of the church’. See Ideström, ed. *For the Sake of the World: Swedish Ecclesiology in Dialogue With William T. Cavanaugh* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009) 1. The sense of a movement is beginning to develop with the formation of the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network in 2007; this will doubtless continue with the publication of the first two volumes of the Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography series, forthcoming from Eerdmans in 2012.

a) *The tasks of the thesis*

I will refer to these concretely oriented, practically minded and empirically informed ecclesiologies as *concrete ecclesiologies*.⁵ Although it is possible to trace the roots of such concrete approaches back some thirty years or more, the field has only begun to develop rapidly in the last ten to fifteen years.⁶ Working with such a young and dynamic theological field presents three major challenges, which give us the three principal tasks of the thesis.

The rapid growth of concrete ecclesiologies over the past ten to fifteen years has been remarkable. From the turn of the millennium onwards, an increasing number of theologians have been engaging the question, ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’, redefining the object of ecclesiological inquiry and working out the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.⁷ Despite this enthusiastic industry – in fact, perhaps because of it – concrete ecclesiologies have yet to be properly defined and described as a distinct theological genre.⁸ The first task of the thesis is to define concrete ecclesiologies as a genre for the first time, by describing their shared characteristics and arguing that

⁵ I will use the plural, concrete ecclesiologies, throughout the thesis. This reflects the fact that concrete ecclesiologies are unified by a loose methodological common sense rather than by a single, consciously shared theological programme.

⁶ Healy notes a general turn to the concrete across the last three to four decades in his ‘Ecclesiology and Practical Theology’ in *Keeping Faith in Practice: Catholic Perspectives on Practical and Pastoral Theology*, ed. James Sweeney et al (London: SCM, 2010) 117–30 (117). I will suggest in chapter one that the general turn to the concrete church becomes well established only following the rise of postliberal theology in the 1970s–80s.

⁷ Michael Jinkins and Nicholas Healy are probably the first to articulate the concrete ecclesiological project in its current form. While Jinkins’ earlier book has gone relatively unrecognised, Healy’s has been at the centre of ongoing conversations on ‘ecclesiological ethnography’, which he proposes in Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 168–74.

⁸ Healy comes closest to defining concrete ecclesiologies in his very brief characterisation of what he calls ‘the new ecclesiology’ in Nicholas M Healy, ‘Misplaced Concreteness? Practices and the New Ecclesiology,’ *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5:3 (2003): 287–308 (287–8). He also briefly describes what he calls ‘practical ecclesiology’ in his ‘Ecclesiology and Practical Theology’ 117–30 (120). Douglas Gay uses Healy’s term ‘new ecclesiology’ in Gay, ‘A Practical Theology of Church and World: Ecclesiology and Social Vision in 20th Century Scotland,’ (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2006) 2. I will distinguish my ‘concrete ecclesiologies’ from Healy’s ‘new ecclesiology’ in Chapter One, see 24–5.

these amount to a distinctive methodological common sense. Defining concrete ecclesiologies will also mean looking at their provenance for the first time, both in terms of their roots in twentieth century theology, and in terms of their roots in broader cultural changes.⁹

Writing about twentieth century ecclesiologies' penchant for models and theory, Healy comments, 'The impression is given – in many cases no doubt a false one – that theologians believe that it is necessary to get our *thinking* about the church right first, after which we can go on to put our theories into practice.'¹⁰ Concrete ecclesiologies, by contrast, are a thoroughly practical form of reasoning: so practical, in fact, that they have yet to look backwards over their shoulders to consider where they have come from, in either theological or cultural terms.¹¹ Exploring concrete ecclesiologies' provenance will show us that the sheer number of theological and cultural influences that converge to form their methodological common sense produce significant theological and methodological tensions within this nascent genre. These tensions are intensified when ecclesiologists seek to borrow methods from social science. The second task of this thesis is to critically engage with concrete ecclesiologies, in order to describe the tensions at work in their methodological project. I will focus my critical attention particularly on concrete ecclesiologies' use of

⁹ Concrete ecclesiologies' connections with postliberalism (especially the Hauerwasian school of ethics) are very briefly discussed in Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 287–8, and their connections with practical theology briefly indicated in Healy's 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 117. These by no means amount to a comprehensive account of concrete ecclesiologies' theological and cultural influences. I anticipate that a fuller account will be forthcoming in Elizabeth Phillips' chapter 'Charting the 'Ethnographic Turn': Theologians and the Study of Christian Congregations' in the forthcoming *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2012), the first volume in a 'Studies in Ecclesiology and Ethnography' series.

¹⁰ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 36.

¹¹ Healy argues that 'theological reflection upon the church is in fact from the very outset a matter of practical rather than theoretical reasoning.' Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 46

social science and the development of what has been called ‘ecclesiological ethnography’.¹²

Quite often, new and improved approaches to problems tend to articulate their approach in terms of what they are *not* doing. Concrete ecclesiologies are no exception, and tend to express their project contrastively with twentieth century approaches to ecclesiology.¹³ While I will uphold concrete ecclesiologies’ basic convictions throughout the thesis – that the concrete church is worthy of attention, and that social science can help us to attend to it – I will suggest that they are currently constrained by the terms of their own self-definition. Constructive work is needed to help concrete ecclesiologies develop greater theological maturity and greater social-scientific sophistication.¹⁴ The third task of the thesis is to engage in theological reflection on the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the function of ecclesiological reflection, in order to help concrete ecclesiologies address the tensions of their theological inheritance, face the challenges of their current context and engage fruitfully with social science.

In what follows, then, I will be engaging the question ‘What is ecclesiology about?’, and concrete ecclesiologies’ answers to it, in a way that is descriptive, critical and constructive. The three aims of the thesis are as follows:

(i) to define concrete ecclesiologies as a distinct genre and describe their theological and cultural provenance;

¹² See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 168–74 and Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 101.

¹³ Roger Haight’s work is a good example: ‘Against the background of an ecclesiology that is abstract, idealist, and a-historical, an ecclesiology from below is concrete, realist and historically conscious.’ See Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 5.

¹⁴ The idea that thinking in opposites or dichotomies undermines the development of theological maturity is Clare Watkins’: see her ‘Text and Practices: An Ecclesiology of *Traditio* For Pastoral Theology,’ in ed. Sweeney et al, *Keeping Faith in Practice* 163–78 (163).

(ii) to analyse the difficulties facing concrete ecclesiologies, paying particular critical attention to their use of social science;

(iii) to provide constructive suggestions for how to think about the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.

Before we begin, it will be helpful to summarise and characterise the argument that follows. I will offer a short chapter-by-chapter summary of the argument of the thesis, and then move on to make some points about analysis, writing and approach that should be addressed before we start telling the story in earnest.

2. Summarising

The three aims of the thesis outlined above correspond roughly to the progression of the argument.

a) The progression of the argument

The principal aim of chapter one is to define concrete ecclesiologies as a distinct and recognisable genre, and suggest where they have come from. This will involve four steps. First, we need to situate the development of concrete ecclesiologies within the context of the widespread turn to the concrete church in twentieth century theology. Second, having described concrete ecclesiologies as a distinctive methodological common sense, we need to explore their key identifying characteristics. Defining concrete ecclesiologies and setting them in context will lead us to the third task of chapter one: tracing the roots of concrete ecclesiologies back into twentieth century theology, showing how they emerge on one hand from Barth and postliberal

theology, and on the other from changes to Roman Catholic theology following Vatican II. With their theological provenance described, I will then show how concrete ecclesiologies can also be seen as arising in response to cultural changes associated with postmodernity.

Chapter two picks up one element of concrete ecclesiologies' common sense, their use of social science, and looks at the development of what has been called 'ecclesiological ethnography'. The purpose of the chapter is to take a close and critical look at concrete ecclesiologies' use of anthropology. We will look at five ways in which concrete ecclesiologists consciously use social science, and then at a further two ways in which social science seems to be used unconsciously. From here, the chapter takes a more critical turn, as we look at the ways in which concrete ecclesiologies are implicated in a number of difficulties, both theological and ethnographic. I will suggest that concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to think of their task as bringing two perspectives (theology and ethnography) to bear upon a single object (the church) results in caricatured understandings of the nature of both disciplines, and a problematic way of understanding the relationship between the two. I will argue that the key to solving this problem will be to examine separately in greater depth how ethnographers understand their own object of inquiry, the social real. A more developed understanding of the kind of 'real church' ethnography can give ecclesiology will set us on a better footing for further theological conversation.

In chapter three, I will explore four ways in which ethnographers have understood their object of inquiry, the social real, and the nature of ethnographic knowledge, and argue for the superiority of one view – what I will call pragmatic/relational ethnography. The discussion has three aims: (a) to provide a richer understanding of

ethnography than concrete ecclesiologies currently work with, (b) to establish what kind of 'real church' ethnography can offer ecclesiology and (c) to head off certain uses of ethnography by ecclesiologists. Exploring pragmatic/relational ethnography in greater depth will show that illuminating comparisons can be drawn between the ways in which theology and ethnography relate to their objects of inquiry. I will argue that pragmatic/relational ethnography can help us to develop a richer theological account of the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection, by encouraging us to make the connection between *how* we know and *what* we know. Pragmatic/relational ethnography is successful because its account of *what* anthropologists know (the social real) is governed by *how* that reality is known in the field. Placing the fieldwork experience at the heart of its explanations of the social real allows pragmatic/relational ethnography to give a good account of the unique value and limitations of anthropological knowledge. I will argue that paying attention to how we know the church will be the key to developing a richer theological account of the concrete church, and a renewed understanding of the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.

In chapter four, the thesis moves into more constructive mode. Concrete ecclesiologies' answers to the question 'What is ecclesiology about?' have, thus far, largely taken methodological shape. The aim in this chapter is to advance the theological conversation a little further, by making some constructive suggestions for how we might think about the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. I will argue that the key to this task will be to follow the cue of pragmatic/relational anthropology, and make the connection between *how* we know and *what* we know. I will draw on Wittgenstein's account of meaning and understanding to draw attention to the ordinary ways in which we talk about,

experience and recognise the church. Focussing theological attention on the rough ground of actual practice will yield two constructive suggestions for how we understand the object of ecclesiological inquiry, the concrete church. I will argue that ‘church’ can be helpfully thought of as an analogical, or family resemblance, concept. I will also suggest that reflecting theologically on the culturally embedded and Spirit-guided ways that we recognise churches can give us a useful way of talking about discerning the church. From these suggestions about the object of ecclesiological inquiry will emerge a different understanding of the purpose of ecclesiological reflection: I will suggest that the purpose of ecclesiology is best thought of, not as *defining* the church, but as searching for it.

b) The key terms

Before moving on to characterise the approach of the argument in this thesis, it will be useful to clarify the meaning of some of the terms already used. Many of the terms I have used above – including ‘church’ and ‘ecclesiology’ – will be explored, critiqued and reworked during the course of the argument that follows. As their meaning will change (and be clearly explained) as we go along, it will not be helpful at this point to specify a single consistent meaning for each. Two points regarding the term ‘church’, however, should be noted. First, concrete ecclesiologies do not make the classic distinction between small c ‘church’, usually denoting a church, an individual community or parish, and big C Church, meaning *the* church universal and catholic. Church is almost invariably referred to with a small c – a stylistic decision which, as we shall see, reflects concrete ecclesiologies’ desire not to distinguish too sharply between the universal and ideal church of creedal faith, and the local and concrete

church of experience.¹⁵ I follow concrete ecclesiologies in using a lower case c for the church throughout, although upper case Cs used by quoted authors obviously remain unchanged. I also follow concrete ecclesiologies in referring to ‘church’ with the pronoun ‘it’ and never ‘she’. Second, one of the challenges we will note in the early chapters of the thesis is concrete ecclesiologies’ reluctance to define crisply what they mean by ‘church’ – a decision which, we will see, reflects their desire not to get sidetracked by defining ‘essential Churchness’.¹⁶ In the hands of concrete ecclesiologists, ‘church’ usually denotes ‘the Christian community’.¹⁷ Where I am referring to concrete ecclesiologists’ views, I use church in the same way, and I will use ‘church’ and ‘the Christian community’ interchangeably.

The other note about terms concerns ‘anthropology’ and ‘ethnography’, and their relation to one another. The generic term ‘anthropology’ covers a variety of disciplines, from linguistic anthropology to physical and forensic anthropology. It is used here to refer solely to *cultural* anthropology.¹⁸ A distinction is sometimes made between anthropology and ethnography, on the basis that ethnography is the distinctive method of the anthropological discipline – ethnography deals with fieldwork and raw data, and anthropology with analysis, or ethnography with the

¹⁵ For Healy, giving the church a small ‘c’ is a means of acknowledging the church’s sin. See his comments in Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 6, n.13.

¹⁶ A nice phrase of Michael Jenkins’, for which see Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 80.

¹⁷ Mudge says ecclesiology begins with the ‘gritty, situated “community called church”’. See Lewis Mudge, *Rethinking the Beloved Community: Ecclesiology, Hermeneutics and Social Theory* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001) 2. Healy objects to the use of the phrase ‘Christian community’ in his ‘A (Somewhat) Chastened Ecclesiology,’ (Paper presented at the Being Surprised by God: Embodied Ecclesiology in Local Contexts Conference, Utrecht, 2010), on the grounds that the church does not have ‘a common life and language that is empirically describable’ (7). He does, nevertheless, use the word church as a collective way of referring to followers of Christ.

¹⁸ This, of course, only begs the question ‘What is cultural anthropology?’ and, as Geertz remarks, ‘Everyone knows what cultural anthropology is about: it’s about culture. The trouble is that no one is quite sure what culture is.’ (See Clifford Geertz, *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) 11. For now, I will simply define cultural anthropology as the study of human social life – as distinguished from physical anthropology (human physiology and racial variation) or linguistic anthropology (human language). Chapter three considers a range of possible definitions of the object of anthropological inquiry, and so I will not press the definition any further here.

nitty-gritty of particular field situations, and anthropology with larger questions about epistemology, ethics and so on. Such distinctions run into difficulties: to make too strong a distinction between the gathering of raw data in the field and the subsequent process of analysis is to hang one's coat on a shaky nail, and to suggest that the work of epistemology and ethics is carried out in a manner and place distant from the pressing concerns of the field is simply inaccurate. It is on this basis that I follow Clifford Geertz in using the two terms, 'anthropology' and 'ethnography' interchangeably.¹⁹ Where I am referring to ethnographic fieldwork in particular, this will be made clear in the text.

3. Characterising

Having briefly summarised the progression of the argument and defined some of its key terms, it will now be helpful to explore some of the characteristics of my approach to the topic. A quick look at the bibliography at the end of reading the thesis shows that it contains a fair number of books that do not feature much in the footnotes. Among them are two important resources for the thesis, which affect the style of analysis and writing that follows: Foucault, and feminist theory.

a) Foucault

Concrete ecclesiologies, as we have already seen, are not persuaded of the necessity of getting theory about the church right before putting it into practice. This somewhat gung-ho approach to ecclesiology means that concrete ecclesiologists do not

¹⁹ For Geertz' use of the terms interchangeably, see the first chapter of his Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 1–24.

frequently reflect on or reference their theological influences. Concrete ecclesiologies' lack of reflexivity in this regard makes the first task of this thesis – defining concrete ecclesiologies and describing their emergence – a challenging one, and it is here that Foucault can be a useful analytical resource for the thesis. Two of Foucault's interests make him particularly helpful for the analysis that follows: his attention to the *conditions for the possibility* of discourse, and his concern with the *unconscious* of discourse.

Exploring where concrete ecclesiologies have come from will involve a fair amount of history-of-ideas sort of analysis, in order to trace concrete ecclesiologies' theological, philosophical and anthropological influences. But, as Marilyn Strathern puts it, 'There is a puzzle in the history of ideas. Ideas seem to have the capacity to appear at all sorts of times and places, to such a degree that we can consider them as being before their time or out of date.'²⁰ The task of analysing concrete ecclesiologies' emergence is not just one of finding the first mention of the phrase 'concrete church', or fixing the dates of influential books and conferences. It is also, as Foucault has it, the task of analysing concrete ecclesiologies' *conditions of possibility*.²¹ It means asking what it is about the cultural context of academic theology in twenty-first century Europe and North America that has *allowed concrete ecclesiologies to emerge* as a methodological common sense.²² It is a question of asking how and why concrete ecclesiologies' assumptions and questions find such resonance *now*. One of the things we will note in this connection is that concrete ecclesiologies do not just arise in response to

²⁰ Marilyn Strathern, 'Out of Context: The Persuasive Fictions of Anthropology,' *Current Anthropology* 28:3 (1987): 251–81 (251).

²¹ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock, 1991) xxii.

²² With respect to scientific discourse, Foucault argues that the question is not one of asking what conditions people had to fulfil in order to make their discourse coherent or true in general, but to ask what conditions had to be fulfilled '...to give it, at the time when it was written and accepted, value and practical application as scientific discourse...' See Foucault, *The Order of Things* xiv.

ecclesiological issues, and are not simply trying to resolve ecclesiological problems. Beneath the surface moves of concrete ecclesiologies lie attempts to deal with a range of major problems, from the relationship between theology and social science to theological epistemology and the role of the specialist theologian. This brings us to the second useful tool Foucault gives us: talking about the *unconscious* of discourse.

‘I do not wish to deny the validity of intellectual biographies, or the possibility of a history of theories, concepts and themes. It is simply that I wonder whether such descriptions are themselves enough, whether they do justice to the immense density of scientific discourse, whether there do not exist, outside their customary boundaries, systems of regularities that have a decisive role in the history of the sciences.’²³ It is this concern for whether the history of ideas approach is enough that leads Foucault to inquire after the ‘unconscious’ of science. By this, he does not mean just that which disturbs, resists and deflects the course of scientific inquiry, but ‘a *positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse, instead of disputing its validity and seeking to diminish its scientific nature.’²⁴ In the same way, the analysis of this thesis is also concerned with the positive unconscious of concrete ecclesiologies. As with asking about the conditions for the possibility of concrete ecclesiological discourse, this means trying to discern the broader issues to which concrete ecclesiologies are unconsciously or implicitly responding. Again, this means analysing concrete ecclesiologies in their cultural context. It also means maintaining analytical focus not just on what concrete ecclesiologists say about their use of social science, but on what theological work social science is *doing*, and what function it serves in concrete

²³ Foucault, *The Order of Things* xiii.

²⁴ Foucault, *The Order of Things* xi.

ecclesiological discourse. This means that the thesis will need to draw attention to relevant non-ecclesiological questions at stake and, if not resolve them, then at least lay some theological groundwork towards doing so.

b) Feminist Theory

The thesis is also resourced at a deep level by feminist theory which, though it appears infrequently in the footnotes, has been a consistent thread in my reading and thinking. The influence of feminist theory can be felt in both the content and style of the thesis. First of all, in both the critical and constructive work that follows, there is a commitment to reflexivity and experience, that is, a commitment to conscientious reflection on how others' particular cultural and ecclesial experience forms their theology in general, and their ecclesiology in particular, and how my own experience forms my critical and constructive response. In my constructive work on the church, this commitment to reflexivity takes the form of a concern for those whose particular experience (and its accompanying theological and ecclesiological perspectives) has been historically marginalised or excluded by academic and ecclesiastical authorities.

Feminist theory also informs, to an extent, the written style of the thesis. Research in gender and communication studies suggests that men and women typically communicate in different ways.²⁵ In general, male communication tends to value arguments that are critical, rhetorical, assertive, linear, logical and argumentative. Female communication tends to value arguments that are reflexive, intuitive, spatial, lateral, demonstrative and experiential. Male communication typically prioritises

²⁵ Major interest and research in this area was sparked by Robin Lakoff's influential study, *Language and Woman's Place* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975). For an overview of subsequent challenges and qualifications to Lakoff's study, see Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet, *Language and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 157–91.

problem solving, and adopts a 'reporting' style that sees itself as representing a reality believed to be stable; this tends to efface the writer, and treat the audience as essentially passive listeners.²⁶ Female communication typically prioritises rapport building with listeners, processing information, reflecting on topics, and typically shows concern for things like character, relationships and biography.²⁷ Good academic argument and good academic style are usually defined with principal reference to the characteristics of male communication.²⁸ Whether these typical differences in preferred communicative and argumentative style are biologically 'hard' or culturally 'soft' is open to debate and (at least here) not relevant.²⁹ Nor is it relevant that academic style is learned, and may or may not come naturally to anyone, regardless of gender. What *is* relevant is that the definition of 'good' academic writing and argument is shaped around the experience and typical preferences of the people who have historically formed – and indeed still form – the overwhelming majority of the academic field: men.

What does this mean for the style of what follows? It does not mean that I will deliberately *try* to write in a way that reflects the list of female characteristics I listed above. Rather, it means that I will not try to edit out the accent of my communicative mother tongue. Contrary to academic convention, which tends to efface the writer, I will use the first person pronouns 'I' (meaning the author) and 'we' (meaning the reader and author) throughout. The style of the writing will also be slightly more conversational, more engaging of the reader, than the conventional reporting style,

²⁶ See Deborah Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (London: Virago, 1992); for problem solving, see 64–8; for treating the audience as passive, see 123–6.

²⁷ See Tannen, *You Just Don't Understand*; for symmetry and rapport building, 58–9 and 89–93; for use of experience see 91–2.

²⁸ For interesting comment on gender and assessing academic standards, see Carole Blair, et al., 'Disciplining the Feminine,' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80 (1994): 383–409.

²⁹ Julia T Wood has an accessible discussion of the cultural factors here in her *Gendered Lives: Gender, Communication and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1997).

which tends to treat the reader as passive. Where I engage in critical work, this does have a demonstrative feel to it: I am trying to *show* how concrete ecclesiologies make certain moves, or encounter certain problems. Any or all of these stylistic characteristics may well jar with readers accustomed to conventional stylistic language, and it could be argued that a doctoral thesis is not the place to push the boundaries of academic convention. Yet to insist that women need to graduate through androcentric stylistic conventions before being allowed to challenge them is to accept and reinforce academia's structural discrimination against women.

c) *Watching language*

We have been created by God, placed before Him, destined for Him, called to the immediate participation in His glory. But now we are still in the world – we are not yet there where we will be for all eternity. This demands humility of us (recognition of the fact that we are still “on the way”) and courage (striving for the future community with God).³⁰

One of the features Foucault and feminism hold in common is the way in which they *watch* language intently, acutely conscious of its power to shape and reshape our worlds of thought and experience. The same trait also defines theologians: Nicholas Lash suggests that we define theologians as people who watch their language in the presence of God.³¹ The theological approach of this thesis is characterised by watching language about the church. In the early chapters of the thesis, this ‘watching’ simply means observing how language about the church has changed over the past thirty years, and suggesting why it has done so. In the last chapter, however, ‘watching’ our language about the church becomes a constructive theological agenda

³⁰ Karl Rahner, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker (London: Sheed & Ward, 1967) 17.

³¹ The definition originates with Gerald O’Collins: see Nicholas Lash, ‘All Good Reasoning Proceeds From Prior Commitments and Beliefs,’ *The Guardian* Main Section Sat July 2nd 2011: 43.

– it is about being *careful* with our language about the church, conscious that it is language in the presence of God.

Being careful means recognising that our language about the church, as well as the church itself, is *in via*: in our discipleship and in our theology, we are only ever ‘on the way to church’. This demands humility in our speech about the church, and an honest recognition that our language and our lives fall short. Yet that the church is ‘on the way’ should be a hopeful as well as a humble admission, for the church is on the way *somewhere*: on the way to the God whom it confesses as the source, sustainer and consummation of all that is. This means that our church talk should also be characterised by courage and by confidence, too – confidence enough to engage deeply with other disciplines, and courage enough to allow those disciplines to challenge our language and categories. Only by constantly re-asking and re-answering simple questions like ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’, and by constantly breaking and reshaping our language about the church, can we keep ecclesiology a discipline in service of a church ‘on the way’ and a God who lives.

Chapter One: Concrete Ecclesiologies

Introduction

Kxoma and Tuma, two !Kung men travelling with us, suggested we make our camp at this site where Richard Lee and Nancy Howell, other anthropologists, had set their camp four years earlier. Living where someone has lived before was right, they said; it connected you to the past. The slender stick shell of Richard and Nancy's hut was still there. It stood out in the moonlight, a bizarre skeleton set apart from the surrounding bush.³²

In this chapter, we arrive in the field. The purpose of the chapter is to survey and describe the theological landscape with which we will be concerned in the thesis, and to *define* it as a field for the first time. Our first task on arriving in the field will be to describe the stick shell, by looking at what 'the concrete church' is, and explaining what I mean by 'concrete ecclesiologies'. We can then ask about the campsite, detailing who the inhabitants of this theological landscape are, and how they came to be here. This exploration of the field will set us up for the work of the following chapters, in which we will gather resources to repair and strengthen concrete ecclesiologies.

I have chosen to start this chapter with an arrival narrative because, before we begin the work of description and repair, I want to suggest that theologians have much to learn from ethnographers about arriving in the field. Ethnographic writing is being increasingly shaped by the recognition that ethnographers are part of the social fact under investigation. Put simply, anthropologists are humans alongside their subjects of investigation, social beings investigating other social beings. The ethnographer's subjectivity cannot be bracketed out in the field, nor relegated to the foreword of ethnographic texts: it runs through both field and text, shaping encounter and

³² Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981) 20–1.

narrative equally. Systematic theology, with its analogous sense of ‘field’ as similar writings, shared influences and research associations, lacks ethnography’s reflexivity. Our sense of our presence in the field is directed towards what needs saying, how we can be original, and how other people are subtly or not-so-subtly wrong: we are in the business of repairing the skeletons of other researchers’ huts. The task of this thesis is, of course, descriptive, critical and constructive – I am also in the business of hut repair. But my claim at the start of this thesis is that theologians need to acknowledge that we too are deeply bound up in the matters of which we speak. We work in an inhabited landscape, and we arrive in a field of persons as well as a field of ideas.

What we need, I suggest, is a *theological* arrival narrative. All theology starts from a particular academic and pastoral setting and has a particular audience or problem in mind. Yet these differences are perhaps less important than what we share with other scholars in our field: an instinct that theological work needs doing in the area, that these issues are important, or that some problem needs addressing.³³ This means that any inquiries about the historical, theological or cultural factors driving other theologians to ask particular questions are also an examination of our own conscience, motives and influences. If we diagnose certain theological influences behind a theological trend or field of interest, it is likely that these theological influences lie behind our own work. If we perceive others as responding to a cultural or ecclesial need, it is probable that we, too, are responding to a similar situation. Exploring the origins of the field of study will therefore shed light on our own reasons for engaging with it. Our arrival in the field must start with the question ‘Why are we here?’ and

³³ Mary McClintock Fulkerson describes this inchoate sense that something needs to be addressed as a response to a wound. See Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 13–18.

then, following Robert Jenson, ‘...In that we have heard and seen such-and-such discourse as gospel, what shall we now say and do that gospel may again be spoken?’³⁴

This arrival narrative, describing the rise in theological interest in the concrete church and exploring its roots, will therefore serve a number of purposes. First, it will begin to map the field, showing the confluence of historical, theological and cultural factors that are its *raison d’être*. Second, this survey will allow me to draw out the purpose and value of this study, as I begin to demonstrate tensions in the way theological approaches to the concrete church are currently conceived and practiced. Third, in delineating the theological, historical and cultural factors driving the field in which my intervention is placed, I will begin to develop what Roger Haight calls ‘historical consciousness’: a sense of the limitedness of my own work by time and place, and a keener sense of the origin of my own theological instinct that work is needed in the field.³⁵

The chapter will proceed in four sections. In the first, I will trace the rise of concrete approaches to ecclesiology, and begin to describe the characteristics of concrete ecclesiologies. This will give us an idea of the fluidity of the field we are dealing with in the thesis, and some of the challenges involved in contributing to the debate. In the second section, we will trace the two main roots of concrete ecclesiologies in the twentieth century: postliberal theology, and changes to Roman Catholic theology following Vatican II. Then, in the third section, we will fill out this theological history by situating concrete ecclesiologies within their cultural context, and suggesting ways in which they may be responding to the challenges of doing

³⁴ Robert W Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol.1: The Triune God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 14.

³⁵ Haight, *Christian Community Vol. 1* 27.

ecclesiology in postmodernity. In the fourth section, we will ask where the investigation needs to go from here: what needs repairing, and how we will go about the task.

1. The rise of concrete ecclesiologies

a) The turn to the concrete

In order to define the field of interest, concrete ecclesiologies, I will draw a series of concentric circles. This will help us to situate the emergence of concrete ecclesiologies both within the context of a general theological shift, and a general shift across a range of academic disciplines.

The development of an increased and widespread interest in the concrete church has been evident for some time in theology.³⁶ In works ranging from ethics to biblical studies, there is a renewed sense of the importance of the living church for academic theology. Among other things, the church is indicated as the source for theology's reflection, the norm for its usefulness, and the justification for its existence. Alongside this general rise in rhetorical appeals to the church, it is now quite common to come across descriptive accounts of living communities, both of a more formally ethnographic kind and a more anecdotal tenor, in a wide range of theological writings. Both appeal to the *concrete* church as an historical, cultural entity, as a living community rather than as an ahistorical ideal type. The focus is on the church

³⁶ Nicholas Healy notes this general turn to the concrete in his essay 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 117–8. He suggests that the turn comes about as theologians begin to articulate that Christianity is not first and foremost a system of doctrine or a religious theory, but a concrete way of life (117).

as a marked and marking social body: there is much talk of church practices, social distinctiveness and the church as God's story.

This interest in particular embodied communities is not unique to theology. It comes as part of what Clifford Geertz calls the 'moral and epistemological vertigo' that affects disciplines across the academic spectrum as they shift and change under the influence of postmodernity.³⁷ The symptoms of this postmodern shift are familiar: as well as a general suspicion of metanarratives and a genealogical approach to history of institutions, there is also a preoccupation with narrative, practices and discourse, a chastening of Enlightenment optimism about knowledge and progress, and a shift of epistemology away from Enlightenment presuppositions about objectivity and reason. These themes are easily recognisable in contemporary theology, from Hans Frei's work on biblical narrative and intratextual hermeneutics, through Hauerwas' preoccupation with virtues and the church as a social ethic, all the way to Mark D. Jordan's genealogical work on the invention of sodomy in Christian theology.³⁸ The widespread turn to communities and practices means that there is also a shift across the academic spectrum towards using language and modes of analysis borrowed from cultural studies.³⁹ At the same time, cultural studies itself has undergone a significant post-colonial and postmodern transformation.

³⁷ Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 128. 'Postmodernity' is shorthand for a complex and interrelated set of cultural phenomena. For a good summary, see the first chapter of Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity: Christian Identity in a Fragmented Age* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

³⁸ See Hans W Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2003); Mark D Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

³⁹ Linell E Cady describes this move as a 'paradigm shift' in her 'Loosening the Category That Binds: Modern "Religion" and the Promise of Cultural Studies,' in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue With Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delwin Brown et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 17–40 (17–18). Healy notes that the turn to the concrete has resulted in theology using critical disciplines like history and social science. Practical theology in particular has drawn on many different disciplines, including social science and social psychology, 'in order to develop rich, critically

The reason I have briefly set concrete ecclesiologies within theology's broader turn to the concrete church, and that turn within the broader postmodern academic shift, is to draw attention to the fact that these complicate the task of defining 'ecclesiology'. Ecclesiology used to be a recognisable and discrete area of theology, concerned with church order, sacraments and the nature, origin, purpose and end of the church. Now, with the increased interest generally in communities and practices, ecclesiology has become like a rock pool around which the tide has risen: the discipline is either invisible or ubiquitous.⁴⁰ Ecclesiology has become the new fundamental theology.⁴¹ This 'rock pool' effect makes it tricky to distinguish between those theologians whose work involves a general turn to the concrete church, and those I will call concrete ecclesiologists. For now, we can explain the difference by saying that whereas concrete ecclesiologies are ecclesiologies (or theological reflection) that take the concrete church as their object (e.g. they focus on and talk about the concrete church), the general turn to the concrete uses the church to do other work, or talk about other things: biblical interpretation, ethics, and so on.⁴² The distinction is fuzzy, not definite, and some scholars are easier to place than others. Alasdair

informed descriptions of church life that point to areas for improvement...'. See Healy, 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 117.

⁴⁰ Mary McClintock Fulkerson describes the same change in a different way in her Mary McClintock Fulkerson, 'Theology and the Lure of the Practical: An Overview,' *Religion Compass* 1:2 (2007): 294–304.

⁴¹ For remarks in this vein, see Harald Hegstad, 'From Congregational Studies to Congregational Development: On the Different Modes of Ecclesiology,' (Paper presented at the Being Surprised by God: Embodied Ecclesiology and Local Contexts Conference, Utrecht, 2010) 2, and Lewis Mudge and Gerard Mannion's introduction to *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* (London: Routledge, 2008): 'Seen as "fundamental theology," ecclesiology concerns the nature of the social space which makes language about God, and therefore faith itself, possible.' 3.

⁴² Healy names George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, Stanley Hauerwas, Kathryn Tanner, Greg Jones and Bruce Marshall 'and many others' as fellow travelers in 'the new ecclesiology' in 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 287. To these, Doug Gay adds John Howard Yoder, James McLendon, John Milbank, Miroslav Volf and Reinhard Hütter, who he says are 're-focussing theological attention on the practices of the 'concrete church' and on the 'public' character of ecclesiology.' See Gay, 'Church and World' 2. While many of these are engaged in a turn to the concrete church, I would hesitate to call some of their work ecclesiology, which is why I have not taken up the term 'new ecclesiology' used by Gay and Healy.

MacIntyre's work, for example, exhibits a turn to the concrete church, but he is not an ecclesialogist. The work of someone like Stanley Hauerwas, however, is somewhat harder to place – it is sometimes ethics with a turn to the concrete, but sometimes the church becomes the focus of discussion and we could call it concrete ecclesiology.⁴³ Not all those whose thought on the church I will address are recognisably 'ecclesialogists' at all, insofar as they may not directly address the subject of the church in the classic sense of ecclesiology, nor discuss the church in a particularly systematic or doctrinal way.⁴⁴ More differences between the general turn to the concrete and what I am defining as concrete ecclesiologies will become evident as we trace their theological and cultural provenance, but with these cautions in mind, we can move on to define 'the concrete church' and 'concrete ecclesiologies'.

b) Concrete ecclesiologies

i) The concrete church

What is the concrete church, and what is a concrete approach to ecclesiology? As concrete approaches to ecclesiology have developed, particularly over the past twenty years, ecclesialogists have begun to define more clearly what has hitherto been an assumed object of study, appealed to, but not defined. The concrete church is the

⁴³ In his *In Good Company*, Hauerwas writes, 'These essays fall into that area of theology called ecclesiology, but I do not pretend to deal adequately with the scriptural, historical, and systematic issues usually thought necessary to "do" ecclesiology.' Nevertheless, it would be hard to find a theologian more consistently preoccupied with the church than Stanley Hauerwas. See Stanley Hauerwas, *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995) 10.

⁴⁴ For example, Amy Plantinga Pauw discusses Kathryn Tanner's 'incipient ecclesiology' in her article review, 'Ecclesiological Reflections on Kathryn Tanner's *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57:2 (2004): 221–27.

church in its historical, sinful, cultural and embodied theological reality.⁴⁵ It is not just the empirical church, nor simply the church as an institution: concrete ecclesiologies tend to reject the dichotomy between the church's theological and empirical identity, or visible and invisible aspects.⁴⁶ Concrete ecclesiologies often define the concrete church in terms of what it is *not* (abstract, idealised and essential) and we will explore later the degree to which this negative definition causes difficulties. For a positive definition, we can turn to Nicholas M. Healy, one of the first theologians to articulate the turn to the concrete church in an ecclesiological context. He writes,

it [the concrete church] can be summarily described as a distinctive way of life, made possible by the gracious action of the Holy Spirit, which orients its adherents to the Father through Jesus Christ...The Christian way of life is distinctive because its Lord is a particular person and its God is triune. Its life takes concrete form in the web of social practices accepted and promoted by the community as well as in the activities of its individual members.⁴⁷

ii) Concrete ecclesiologies

Although Healy's definition sounds quite Hauerwasian – the emphasis on the church's distinctiveness and social practices comes through quite strongly – concrete ecclesiologies are not principally discussion of whether and how the church is a social

⁴⁵ Healy distinguishes between the empirical church and the concrete church in his *Church, World and the Christian Life* 4. For a distinction between the institutional church and the concrete church, see Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 42 and Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 4. For arguments against distinguishing between the visible and invisible church, see Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 48, Mudge, *Beloved Community* 9.

⁴⁶ See Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics' in *The Hauerwas Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 371–91: 'The people of God are no less an empirical reality than the crucifixion of Christ. The church is as real as his cross. There is no 'ideal church,' no 'invisible church,' no 'mystically existing universal church' more real than the concrete church with parking lots and pot luck dinners.' (382–3). This refusal to separate visible and invisible sometimes results in talk of the church as sacrament, for which see Clare Watkins, 'The Church as 'Special' Case: Comments From Ecclesiology Concerning the Management of the Church,' *Modern Theology* 9:4 (1993): 369–84.

⁴⁷ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 4–5.

ethic.⁴⁸ Rather, concrete ecclesiologies attempt to *make sense* of the concrete church. As Harald Hegstad puts it, ecclesiology's basic question is whether the church of faith is also available to experience.⁴⁹ Concrete ecclesiologies' fundamental conviction is that the concrete church should be the starting point for theological reflection – the church as it is, as we know it, rather than what the church should ideally be like.⁵⁰ So Stanley Hauerwas, for example, appeals to the theological significance of the church of 'parking lots and potluck dinners'.⁵¹ Roger Haight argues that '[t]he principal object of ecclesiology consists in the empirical organization or collectivity or community called church'.⁵² One of the fullest articulations of the concrete approach to ecclesiology, which is also representative of the tone of many such articulations, comes from Michael Jenkins' *The Church Faces Death*. It is worth quoting at length:

I would argue that the church we know in actuality, the church we experience in ordinary time, the church that worships in assorted settings under a variety of names in a diversity of ways on Sunday mornings throughout the world, the church that argues and mourns and rejoices and heals, the church that endures the pressures to provide services for religious consumers, the church of endless committee meetings and dirty linen washed in public, this church *is* the church of which we speak and to which the Word of God is addressed, and through which the Word of God makes Godself known in and through and as human speech. This is the church God intends and loves and redeems. And so when we speak of church we cannot afford to lapse into ecclesiological essentialism. We must pay attention to this church and the speech of this church.⁵³

⁴⁸ The phrase comes from Hauerwas: 'The church does not have a social ethic but is a social ethic, then, insofar as it is a community that can be clearly distinguished from the world...Put bluntly, the church is in the world to mark us.' Stanley Hauerwas 'The Gesture of a Truthful Story,' in Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World and Living in Between* (Durham: Labyrinth Press, 1988) 101–110 (101, 103).

⁴⁹ See Harald Hegstad, 'Ecclesiology and Empirical Research on the Church,' (Paper presented at the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network Conference, Oxford, 2008) 3.

⁵⁰ See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 3. In another essay, Healy writes, 'While it may well be useful on occasion to present ideal accounts of the Church, these should be complemented by sufficient theological attention to what the Church can do and become, here and now, in this particular situation, given these empirical factors.' See his 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 119.

⁵¹ 'It is the church of parking lots and potluck dinners that comprises the sanctified ones formed by and forming the continuing story of Jesus Christ in the world.' See Stanley Hauerwas, 'The Servant Community' 383.

⁵² He adds 'although it is also more than that as the history of ecclesiology plainly shows. The "more" lies in the fact that this church is experienced religiously or theologically, because in it and through it people recognize the presence and activity of God.' See Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 5.

⁵³ Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 73.

For Jenkins, the challenge of ecclesiology is having the imagination to see what is really there. What we require is ‘the imagination to speak clearly about what it means when we speak of the church ordinary.’⁵⁴ One of the reasons I quote Jenkins at such length is because I want to draw attention to the impassioned and rhetorical way in which the commitment to the concrete church is expressed, and the way (quite Barthian) language about the Word of God mixes with resolutely quotidian references to dirty linen and meetings. What is argued for is also assumed as common sense: that our thought about the church should begin with the church of our experience.

As well as with passionate appeals to the sacredness of the ordinary, concrete approaches to ecclesiology also tend to be defined in opposition to modern ecclesiologies. Healy begins his *Church, World and the Christian Life* by stating that his study arises out of the sense that twentieth century ecclesiology’s preoccupation with models and the church’s essential nature had been less helpful to the church than it could have been, and so his articulation of concrete ecclesiology proceeds in contrast to such ecclesiologies.⁵⁵ Likewise, Jenkins uses a critique of taxonomic

⁵⁴ Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 87.

⁵⁵ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 3. Healy describes five characteristics of modern ecclesiology as follows: ‘One is the attempt to encapsulate in a single word or phrase the most essential characteristic of the church; another is to construe the church as having a bipartite structure. These two elements are often combined, third, into a systematic and theoretical form of normative ecclesiology. A fourth element is a tendency to reflect upon the church in abstraction from its concrete identity. And one consequence of this is, fifth, a tendency to present idealized accounts of the church.’ *Church, World and the Christian Life* 26. Healy contrasts such highly systematised modern accounts of church with pre-modern accounts of church from Augustine (55–6), Aquinas (56–8) and Calvin (58–9), arguing that premodern ecclesiologies are more practically minded: ‘Doctrines about the church are formulated to serve the tasks of the church rather than for theoretical purposes.’ (59). I wonder if, in articulating his project in contrast to modern/twentieth-century ecclesiologies, Healy underplays some of the ways in which these ecclesiologies are *also* responding to practical concerns. Haight argues that ‘twentieth-century ecclesiology betrays a growing consciousness, appreciation, and organization of pluralism’ and a sense that ‘the ecumene, or whole world, both in geographical terms of the five continents and human terms of the secular sphere of human activity, progressively becomes the horizon for understanding the church’. It could be argued that, in trying to systematise and organise this pluralism, twentieth-century ecclesiology *is* responding to a practical concern. See Haight, *Christian Community in History Vol.2 Comparative Ecclesiology* (London: Continuum 2005) 368. Haight’s discussion of the ecumenical movement and the formation of the World Council of Churches is interesting in this context: see *ibid.* 369–82.

approaches to ecclesiology in order to articulate his own, more concrete approach.⁵⁶ Perhaps the best example of such contrastive definition is Roger Haight's articulation of the difference between ecclesiologies from above and ecclesiologies from below: 'Against the background of an ecclesiology that is abstract, idealist, and a-historical, an ecclesiology from below is concrete, realist and historically conscious.'⁵⁷ Concrete ecclesiologies are empirical rather than doctrinal, from below rather than from above, real rather than ideal, concrete rather than abstract, local rather than universal, and so on.⁵⁸ Again, we will explore later on some of the difficulties that come with concrete ecclesiologies' tendency towards contrastive self-definition. For now, we need to go on to explore the field we have begun to describe.

iii) A methodological common sense

⁵⁶ Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 50–68

⁵⁷ Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 4–5. While Haight makes clear that the distinctions are between ideal types, his description of ecclesiologies from above, and his articulation of his own programme in distinction from them, leaves little doubt that he has in mind a certain sort of Magisterial ecclesiology. For example, contrasting the approach of an 'ecclesiology from below' with an 'ecclesiology from above', he notes a number of factors that render the former appropriate: its historical consciousness, its attention to globalisation and pluralism, its ecumenical and interreligious focus, its recognition of the phenomenon of secularisation, and its attention to human suffering and the experience of women. (Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 27–35.) The implication is that ecclesiologies from above are unable or unwilling to address these issues, issues that Haight sees as requiring serious attention. His comments on the historical consciousness that drives ecclesiologies from below sets him apart from much traditional Roman Catholic ecclesiology: a historical consciousness recognises that things could be different, that change is not problematic, and that structures do not have to be perennial. (Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 61.)

⁵⁸ For the empirical/doctrinal and from below/from above distinctions see Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 18–35, 56–66. For the local/universal and concrete/abstract distinction see Walter Kasper, 'On the Church,' *America Magazine* April 23rd 2001, in which he also quotes Henri de Lubac: 'A universal church which would have a separate existence, or which someone imagined as existing outside the particular churches is a mere abstraction. God does not love empty abstractions. He loves the concrete human beings of flesh and blood. God's eternal saving will intended the incarnation of the Logos in view of the concrete church composed of people of flesh and blood.' (I am using an online copy of the article at http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=1569, for which no pagination is available.) Kasper gives no reference for the de Lubac quotation, and I have been unable to locate it. The closest quotation I have been able to source is de Lubac's reference to J J von Allmen's words, 'God does not love empty abstractions' in Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982) 210.

So far, I have described a widespread rise in interest in the concrete church, and shown how ecclesialogists have picked up on this, and begun to develop concrete ecclesialogies. I will retain use of the plural, concrete ecclesialogies, throughout the thesis, in order to draw attention to the fact that this is not a self conscious or unified movement. Rather, it is a *methodological common sense*, a diverse group of theologians gathered around a methodological commitment to the concrete church.⁵⁹ While divided by their theological reasons for addressing the concrete church, concrete ecclesialogists are united by their instinct that the concrete church must be the primary focus of ecclesialogy. Without squashing this diverse body of theologians into a pre-prepared framework, it is possible to draw out three interlinked characteristics of their methodological common sense, which it will be helpful to explore.

First, there is a basic sense of the church as a cultural entity or social body.⁶⁰ This, not something behind, above, or beyond it, is the *real* church, and hence it is the focus of theological attention.⁶¹ This common sense brings with it a commitment to

⁵⁹ The simultaneous development of this methodological common sense is quite remarkable. Jinkins and Healy, with no knowledge of one another's work, critique model based ecclesialogies and call for the development of ecclesialogical/theological ethnography within a year of one another, in strikingly similar language. Compare Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 168–85 and Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 101. See also Idestrom's comments at the beginning of Idestrom, ed. *For the Sake of the World*: 'The reflections of this book do not start from agreement on a common ecclesialogy but from a common interest in doing ecclesialogy based on concrete manifestations of the church...' 1.

⁶⁰ See for example Jonas Idestrom, *Lokal Kyrklig Identitet: En Studie Av Implicit Ecklesialogi Med Exemplet Svenska Kyrkan I Flemingsberg* (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokforlag, 2009) 36–40, and the contributors to Idestrom, *For the Sake of the World*. Lewis Mudge refers to the 'ecclesio-social body' in Mudge, *Beloved Community* 123.

⁶¹ Rahner – though it would be stretching it to call him a concrete ecclesialogist – expresses the logic here quite well in his essay 'What the Church Teaches and What the People Actually Believe'. Here he argues that if there is a faith that saves, it is the faith that people *actually* have, not the faith that they *ought* to have, and that theological attention should therefore be focussed on the former. See Karl Rahner, 'What the Church Teaches and What the People Actually Believe,' in *Theological Investigations XXII: Humane Society and the Church of Tomorrow* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1991) 165–75 (169–70).

engagement with social science.⁶² The church as social body is, like other human groupings, patient of social scientific description.⁶³ While there is some debate over whether social science can do justice to the Godward dimension of the church's existence, there is a basic affirmation that social scientific analysis has some purchase on the church's life.⁶⁴ The forthcoming chapters will focus on this aspect of concrete

⁶² Healy talks about the rise of what he calls 'practical ecclesiology', which he defines as 'a form of ecclesiological enquiry in which empirical accounts of the Church's concrete life contribute vitally to the development and the formulation of a systematic-theological account of the Church.' See his 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 120.

⁶³ Lewis Mudge talks about using social science to ask what the church's Spirit-gathered communities say in their social context. See Lewis Mudge, *The Sense of a People: Toward a Church for the Human Future* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) 138–41; see also Mudge, *Beloved Community* 6–7, 13. For a similar emphasis, see the introduction to Martyn Percy, *Engaging With Contemporary Culture: Christianity, Theology and the Concrete Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). Johannes van der Ven takes a semiotic approach and suggests that 'social phenomena in the church function as religious signs': see Johannes A van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1996) 107. His work is influential in the Dutch context - Rein Brouwer, for example, follows van der Ven's approach and asks about the social shape of *koinonia*: see Rein Brouwer, 'Detecting God in Practices: Theology in an Empirical-Theological Research Project,' *Hervormde Theologische Studies* 66:2 (2010): 1–5 (3–4).

⁶⁴ Concrete ecclesiologies' common sense in this respect is not uncontroversial or uncontested. See, for example, Barth's anathema: '...we must not allow any general or special anthropology to intervene with its supposedly normative suggestions. We cannot be helped to our goal by any definition of man projected from the sphere occupied by a biological, sociological, psychological or ethical conception. Common to all such anthropologies is the fact that their pictures of man are all products of the same human self-understanding...no help is to be found even in the most penetrating analyses of what in any given age...is called "modern" man.' Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.2: The Doctrine of Reconciliation: Jesus Christ the True Witness*, trans. G T Thomson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936) 803. Gary Badcock critiques Healy on Barthian grounds in his Gary Badcock, *The House Where God Lives: The Doctrine of the Church* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2009). Badcock attacks Healy and eschews the grounding of ecclesiology in postmodern theory (6) or contemporary political liberalism's concern for inclusion (23). He writes, '...in order for us to develop an adequate ecclesiology, we must begin not with the human creature, but with God...To grasp the doctrine of the church aright is to begin from God...' (25). Badcock even disagrees with Healy's premise that the church *needs* renewed approaches to ecclesiology: '...however bad our theological situation might be, it is not a theology that will cure it. This would be to replace the Word and work of God with human words and works.' (336).

Another note of caution is sounded by John Milbank in his *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Milbank argues that the social sciences cannot provide theology with a neutral account of history or society that could provide the basis for subsequent theological reflection. He argues that the social sciences are implicated in the 'secular ontology of violence', and that theologians need to develop their own forms of social science based on the Christian 'ontology of peace'. Milbank's critique seems to have made only a small dent in concrete ecclesiologies' enthusiasm for engaging with social science. Healy cautions about the dangers of uncritical correlationist use of social science, and in *Church, World and the Christian Life* suggests that theologians need to develop their own forms of social science (166). However, beyond insisting that use of social science must be grounded in theology, his subsequent work has not pursued this call for developing theological forms of social science, and has focussed instead on the possibility of using social science to watch Christian communities with a minimum of theoretical commitments. (See 'Chastened Ecclesiology' 3). Christian Scharen picks up on Milbank's call for 'judicious narratives' to supplement his idealized picture of the church in *Theology and Social Theory*, but immediately goes on to suggest that ethnography - which he does not explicitly ground in theology - can help provide them, a move which suggests he does not share Milbank's mistrust of social science. See Christian Scharen, "'Judicious Narratives", Or Ethnography as

ecclesiologies, and in particular on those theologians who are trying to develop theological forms of social science, or ‘ecclesiological ethnography’.⁶⁵ Alongside this commitment to social science, concrete ecclesiologies also focus on the church’s social practices.

Second, concrete ecclesiologies tend to view theology itself as a cultural practice. This has been articulated most clearly by Kathryn Tanner, but it has found widespread acceptance among concrete ecclesiologists.⁶⁶ Theology is not something done only by academics, specialists or clergy, but by every Christian who reflects on his or her faith.⁶⁷ There is an essential continuity between what ‘ordinary’ theologians do, and what ‘specialised’ theologians do. Both types of theological reflection confront the same kinds of questions, often in response to particular problems encountered in church life.⁶⁸ Where ordinary theology deals with such issues in an ad-hoc way, specialised theology addresses them in a way that is more sustained and abstract.⁶⁹ Theology is an integral part of Christian life, not a detached speculative exercise. Extending the theological franchise in this way means that concrete ecclesiologies are also committed to the concrete church as the source and norm for specialised

Ecclesiology,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:2 (2005): 125–42 (125–6).

⁶⁵ See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 169; Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 101.

⁶⁶ See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997) 61–92. Harald Hegstad notes that this understanding of theology as something carried out by ‘ordinary’ Christians in congregations is now widespread in his paper, ‘From Congregational Studies to Congregational Development’ 2–3. See also McClintock Fulkerson’s comments in her *Places of Redemption* 233–5. Healy distinguishes between three registers of theology – academic, institutional and ordinary, in a recent article, ‘What is Systematic Theology?’ *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11:1 (2009): 24–39. Jeff Astley’s book length study of ‘ordinary theology’ is the most in depth treatment of the topic yet: see Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002). Astley defines ordinary theology as ‘the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind’ (56).

⁶⁷ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 70.

⁶⁸ While theological reflection is often prompted by glitches in Christian belief and practice, Tanner is clear that theology is not just what happens when things go wrong – it cannot be said to intervene in Christian practices that would ordinarily run smoothly without it. See Kathryn Tanner, ‘Theological Reflection and Christian Practices,’ in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Dorothy C Bass and Miroslav Volf (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2002) 228–42 (228).

⁶⁹ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 70–1.

theological reflection. This means that the specialist ecclesialogist's attention should be focussed on real churches, their faithfulness, the shape of their witness, and the challenges they face within their particular context. It also means that practical usefulness is the test of the theologian's efforts.

It is a short step from this to the next characteristic of concrete ecclesiologies – their commitment to being practically useful. Ecclesiological proposals are to be judged not on their ability to create a seamless theological garment, nor even on their ability to synthesise theological principle with institutional structure: they are to be judged on whether they help the church become more faithful to its Lord.⁷⁰ As Kathryn Tanner puts it, theological reflection is called forth from Christian practices, and returns to them.⁷¹ This means that concrete ecclesiologies have not only a descriptive or hermeneutical function – making theological sense out of the concrete church's life – but also a critical and evaluative function.⁷² This brings us back full circle to the first characteristic, concrete ecclesiologies' use of social science. Concrete ecclesiologies want to reflect on and be practically useful to the real, concrete church. Social science, and particularly ethnography, are seen as useful tools for attending to the concrete.

So far, I have described concrete ecclesiologies as theological reflection that takes the concrete church for its object. I have briefly set the development of concrete ecclesiologies within the context of a wider theological turn to the concrete church, and that turn within wider shifts in the academy occurring as the humanities and social sciences encounter postmodernity. The question we now need to address in

⁷⁰ See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 46; Christian Scharen, 'Judicious Narratives' 133.

⁷¹ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny Or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988) 13.

⁷² Which Healy calls ecclesiology's prophetic function. See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 46–51.

depth is ‘where have concrete approaches to ecclesiology come from?’ We will deal with this in two sections, first looking at the theological provenance of concrete ecclesiologies, and then looking in greater depth at their cultural context.

2. Theological origins

One of the reasons I have chosen to describe concrete ecclesiologies as a methodological common sense is because they represent a variety of theologians committed to the concrete church for different reasons. One of the things we will note in what follows is the degree to which the different theological impulses underlying this common sense create tensions and difficulties. Although it simplifies the complex array of theological influences here, we will trace concrete ecclesiologies’ theological provenance in two strands, first looking at how Barth, Wittgenstein and Geertz meet in postliberal theology, and then looking at changes to Catholic ecclesiology following Vatican II.

a) Postliberal theology: Barth meets Wittgenstein.

David Tracy remarks of Lindbeck’s *The Nature of Doctrine* that ‘The hands may be the hands of Wittgenstein and Geertz but the voice is the voice of Karl Barth’.⁷³ Concrete ecclesiologies’ roots in postliberal theology mean that they owe much to both the insights and pitfalls that come from such a combination. Exploring the postliberal roots of the general turn to the concrete will help us to understand the influences that

⁷³ David Tracy, ‘Lindbeck’s New Programme for Theology: A Reflection,’ *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 460–72 (465). Lindbeck rejects this description in *The Church in a Postliberal Age*, ed. James J Buckley (London: SCM, 2002) 198–9.

produce concrete ecclesiologies and the tensions that beset them. We will begin with the voice – the voice of Karl Barth.

i) Barth

Barth, argues Bruce McCormack, caused a revolution in ecclesiology by rejecting the continuity implicit in substance metaphysics: there is to be no ontological continuity between the witness of the church and its being.⁷⁴ That is, nothing that the church does makes it the church: only *God* makes the church the church. In fact, for Barth, the church is not strictly necessary, because God does not strictly *need* the church to do what God wants to do.⁷⁵ The church is only necessary insofar as it is part of God's decision for the life of the world.⁷⁶ The church is therefore not revelation itself, but only a *witness* to it, participating in the Spirit's witness to what God has achieved in Christ. Concrete ecclesiologies follow Barth in that they largely discard the search for a single principle of the church's being, be it a property (like one, holy, catholic), or an action (like Eucharist, preaching or mission). They also pick up Barth's emphasis on witness, but with a twist. The concrete church never became a direct object of inquiry for Barth. Nigel Biggar argues that this is one of Barth's methodological axioms – he refuses to treat Christian life as an independent object of thought, because

⁷⁴ Bruce L McCormack, '*Credo Sanctam Ecclesiam*: The Holiness of the Church After Barth,' (Paper presented at the Rutherford House Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 2009) 1.

⁷⁵ When Barth talks about the non-necessity of the church for God's purposes, it is in the context of talking about how God, Jesus, the church and the world relate in terms of 'being-for'. The church is for the world only in the sense that God is for the world in Jesus. Humanity, the church included, is not *for* anything, it is the object of the dynamic, so the church can only participate in Jesus' being-for. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV/3.2* 786, 803–4.

⁷⁶ Barth relocates necessity in the divine will. See W Werpehowski, 'Narrative and Ethics in Barth,' *Theology Today* 43:3 (1986): 334–53. 'The theological necessity of any claim is established by tracing back from it to an understanding of how its content refers to that gracious being [of God]. In this way, the integrity of divine revelation as God's self-interpretation is preserved.' (336).

it has no independent existence.⁷⁷ In this respect, concrete ecclesiologies want to go further than Barth, and inquire about the concrete shape of Christian life.⁷⁸ Why do concrete ecclesiologies push further than Barth in this way? Rusty Reno, reflecting on Yale Divinity School in the 1980s, suggests that his professors at the time – Hans Frei and George Lindbeck – were trying to identify ‘carnal anchors to enrich the Barthian legacy’.⁷⁹ Reno writes,

He [Barth] once said of Schleiermacher that the great founder of modern liberal theology tried to talk about God by talking about man in a loud voice. Perhaps we were unconsciously suspicious that Barth tried to talk about God by talking about theology in a loud voice. In a word, Barth’s voice seemed to lack “carnality.”⁸⁰

ii) Wittgenstein

What Barth needed, postliberals thought, was *hands*. In Lindbeck’s scheme the hands, as Tracy points out, are those of Wittgenstein and Geertz. The central Wittgensteinian point picked up by Lindbeck, and by concrete ecclesiologists after him, is his critique of empiricist theories of meaning. Rather than locating meaning in intention, or tying it to ostensive definition, Wittgenstein shows that the meaning of signs is given by their use in a communicative exchange. When I shout ‘Slab!’ on a building site, the meaning of my words is not constituted by me *intending* a block of stone, nor

⁷⁷ Nigel Biggar, *The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth’s Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 140.

⁷⁸ While Barth is the hero of Stanley Hauerwas’, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church’s Witness and Natural Theology* (London: SCM, 2001), he critiques Barth for not providing an account of what difference the church makes, and moves beyond him to talk about particular lives of Christian witness. See Hauerwas, *With the Grain* 145, 216. Healy criticises Barth’s ecclesiology along similar lines in his article, ‘The Logic of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology: Analysis, Assessment and Proposed Modifications,’ *Modern Theology* 10:1 (1994): 253–70. Healy’s criticism is taken up by Joseph Mangina in his article ‘Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52:3 (1999): 269–305. Healy reconsiders his criticism of Barth in his ‘Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology Reconsidered,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57:3 (2004): 287–99, where he suggests that Barth does not have enough theological ways of talking about the concrete church. On this debate, see further Theodora Hawksley, ‘The Freedom of the Spirit: The Pneumatological Point of Barth’s Ecclesiological Minimalism,’ *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64:2 (2011): 180–94.

⁷⁹ Rusty Reno, ‘The Carnal Reality of Revelation,’ *First Things*, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/2010/04/the-carnal-reality-of-revelation> (Accessed April 26th).

⁸⁰ Reno, ‘Carnal Reality’.

because you have checked my word ‘slab’ against your mental image of a slab.⁸¹ The meaning of words is nothing intrinsic to the words themselves, but their function in a communicative exchange. So when I shout ‘Slab!’, the meaning of my utterance could be described by what comes next: you bringing me a large block of stone.⁸² Likewise, the meaning of the rule ‘add two’ is nothing intrinsic to the rule itself: it is rooted in the practice of adding two.⁸³ In short, if we want to ask what things mean, we have to look at what people do with them.⁸⁴ Lindbeck appropriates this by proposing an analogy: religion is like a language, or a language game, and doctrine is like grammar.⁸⁵ Doctrines have meaning not because they refer propositionally, nor because they express experience, but because they act in a grammar or rule-like way in relation to a community. This emphasis on language games and ‘forms of life’ (*Lebensformen*) naturally turns concrete ecclesiologists towards observing the social shape of the church. If we want to know what Christian beliefs mean, we need to look at what Christians do. If our forms of life are what carry meaning then, as Lewis Mudge puts it, we need to attend to what Spirit-gathered communities say in their social context.⁸⁶

iii) Geertz

It is easy to see how Barth’s emphasis on witness and Wittgenstein’s work on meaning, when filtered through postliberal concerns, result in an ecclesiology

⁸¹ See also Wittgenstein’s discussion of the instruction, ‘Bring me a red flower from the meadow’ in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958) 3ff.

⁸² See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G E M Anscombe, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) §19–21.

⁸³ Wittgenstein, *Blue and Brown* 12–14.

⁸⁴ There is a much more extensive discussion of Wittgenstein’s theory of meaning in chapter four: see 167–84.

⁸⁵ Or, as David Kelsey puts it, a chain of metaphors and a final analogy. See David H Kelsey, ‘Church Discourse and the Public Realm,’ in *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation With George Lindbeck*, ed. Bruce Marshall (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 7–33 (8).

⁸⁶ Mudge, *Sense of a People* 13.

committed to using hermeneutical social science. Using the analogy of culture for the church basically enacts the same Wittgensteinian move on a social level. Lindbeck is not advocating the use of social science to study the church, but trying to make a point about how Christian belief and practice should be interpreted – intratextually. Intratextuality is a hermeneutical principle Lindbeck borrows from Frei.⁸⁷ Intratextual accounts of meaning hold that the meaning of a given text (to take Lindbeck's example, *Oedipus Rex* or *War and Peace*) is not found outside the text (in these cases in Freud's theories or Russian history), but within the text itself: the meaning of the text is established by plot, character development, and so on.⁸⁸ Lindbeck advocates intratextual hermeneutics directly in relation to the Bible, and *analogically* with regard to Christian belief – which is where Geertz comes in.⁸⁹ In a famous essay in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz argues that we can only tell the difference between a wink and someone's eye twitching if we immerse ourselves in the semiotic universe in which such signs (or non-signs) are exchanged.⁹⁰ That is, we can only explain cultures from the inside, by laying out their parts in relation to one another.⁹¹ By drawing on Geertz, Lindbeck is again claiming that the significance and meaning of Christian belief and practice can only be explained from within. He is advocating a kind of Christian cultural intratextuality.

iv) Non-foundationalism

⁸⁷ George A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: Westminster John Knox, 1984) 135, 138; See also 'Foreword to the German Edition of *The Nature of Doctrine*' in ed. Buckley, *The Church in a Postliberal Age* 196–200 (197).

⁸⁸ See Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine* 116–24, and Lindbeck's comments on present exegesis in ed. Buckley, *The Church in a Postliberal Age* 211–7.

⁸⁹ Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine* 116–7.

⁹⁰ See Geertz, *After the Fact* 6–12.

⁹¹ There is a much more extensive discussion of Geertz's work in chapter three. See 119–27.

At the start of his 'Archaeology of Knowledge', Foucault talks about the 'epistemological mutation of history'.⁹² What he is talking about is a change in the discipline of historical studies from looking at continuity, progress and coherence, towards looking at disruption, transformation and rupture. The rise of postliberal theology has effected a similar epistemological mutation in theology, altering the way in which theologians approach the truth, meaning, explanation and defence of Christian beliefs. Wittgenstein's emphasis on language games and forms of life has shifted theologians away from the idea that explaining Christian faith needs to begin from universally shared assumptions and beliefs. Although Christianity still explains itself to its cultured despisers, it now thinks it can and should do so on its own terms. Bruce Marshall puts his finger on the key insight of this epistemological mutation:

Lindbeck brought home to me, as did Hans Frei in a different way, the idea that Christians can and should have their own ways of thinking about truth and about deciding what to believe...They need not take their truth claims on loan from some other intellectual or cultural quarter, or regard the only alternative to epistemic servitude as isolation from the broader human conversation about what is true.⁹³

Concrete ecclesiologies owe much to the postliberal instinct that Barth's theology needs to be more incarnate. They also owe much to Lindbeck's efforts to establish a kind of Christian intratextuality, and the resultant postliberal shift from a foundationalist to a non-foundationalist epistemology. However, concrete ecclesiologies also go beyond Lindbeck's conclusions, taking what is a formal analogy between religion and culture, and making it a methodological partnership. Lindbeck's emphasis on the integrity of belief and practice becomes an emphasis on how Christian practices form a whole way of life. Looking at this in more detail will help

⁹² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A M Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock, 1972) 11.

⁹³ Interview with Bruce Marshall, quoted in Gary Dorrien, 'The Future of Postliberal Theology,' *Christian Century* July 18th–25th (2001): 22–29. I am using an online copy, for which no pagination is available.

us, again, to examine the promise and problems of the concrete ecclesiological approach.

Concrete ecclesiologies, along with the wider turn to the concrete church, are interested in what the church *does*. As well as being rooted in the general Wittgensteinian principles we have just discussed, concrete ecclesiologies' discussion of practices also owes much to Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre defines a practice as:

Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the results that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.⁹⁴

MacIntyre's notion of a practice is widely used to explore Christian practices as varied as hospitality, testimony, honouring the body, forgiveness and 'singing our lives'.⁹⁵ It stands behind Hauerwas' heavy emphasis on the importance of church practices for discussing Christian ethics, and indeed behind his statement that the church *is* a social ethic – a whole way of life. Likewise, it is taken up by concrete ecclesiologists as a way of emphasising the integrity of the Christian life. Dorothy Bass writes, 'Practices are those shared activities that address fundamental human needs and that, woven together, form a way of life.'⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 187. Nicholas Healy quotes the same definition in Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 289; the contributors to eds. Bass and Volf, *Practicing Theology* acknowledge their debt to MacIntyre in Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass's chapter, 'A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices' 13–32 (21). Bass adds, 'Our present understanding of practices differs from MacIntyre's account in *After Virtue* in that ours is now theological and thus normed not only internally but also through the responsive relationship of Christian practices to God.' (21 n.8).

⁹⁵ See Dorothy C Bass, ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: John Wiley, 1997).

⁹⁶ Bass, *Practicing Our Faith* ix. Reinhard Hütter points out in his *Suffering Divine Things* that MacIntyre's definition means that '...while bricklaying and planting turnips do not qualify as "practice" according to this understanding, architecture and agriculture do.' See Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2000) 35.

After exploring postliberalism, it should now be becoming clearer why the methodological common sense of concrete ecclesiologies has emerged. Postliberalism's desire to make Barth more incarnate, in combination with Wittgenstein and Geertz's relocation of meaning within the communicative exchange, produce concrete ecclesiologies' hermeneutical quest, their desire to reflect theologically on what the concrete life of the church *means*. As well as inheriting the promising moves of postliberalism, concrete approaches also inherit the considerable tensions that come from finishing with Wittgenstein and Geertz what was started with Barth. It will be helpful briefly to draw attention to these tensions and – without covering the arguments here – note the debates surrounding them.⁹⁷

v) Tensions

Quine once wrote that 'Meaning is what essence becomes when divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word.'⁹⁸ In some respects, concrete ecclesiologies' hermeneutical quest – their move from substance to meaning to action – also shows signs of a displaced, rather than disenfranchised foundationalism. That is, the combination of Barth and Wittgenstein to articulate a new non-foundationalism means that the wider turn to the concrete in theology sometimes looks rather like (as Bruce Marshall puts it) 'realism in search of a truth bearer'.⁹⁹

Many of the other postliberal tensions arising in concrete ecclesiologies result from this fundamental difficulty. Having turned to the concrete church, it now seems that

⁹⁷ I have indicated in the footnotes the specific debates surrounding postliberalism/concrete ecclesiologies' interpretation of Barth and Wittgenstein, and so will focus here on the difficulties arising from the combination of these three influences.

⁹⁸ W V O Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism,' in *Concepts: Core Readings*, ed. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 153–70 (154).

⁹⁹ Bruce D Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 217.

theologians lean too heavily on it, requiring it to bear an epistemological weight that it cannot support. So there is some criticism, for example, of practices being idealised.¹⁰⁰ Postliberal reliance on Christian practices seems not to take account of the fact that they are far from perfect, and rarely communicate what they are meant to in a consistent and clear manner.¹⁰¹ Much criticism has also focused on the fundamental analogies driving the postliberal project, between religion, culture and language. Kathryn Tanner's *Theories of Culture* demonstrates that, on the crucial points, the analogies fall apart. Christianity is *not* like a culture or language, and its practices do *not* form a whole way of life in the way that is often assumed.¹⁰²

A brief summary will be helpful here, before we move on to look at concrete ecclesiologies' roots in post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theology. In this section, I have again set concrete ecclesiologies within the wider turn to the concrete, and traced this turn back to postliberalism. We have seen how postliberals take Barth's emphasis on the integrity of Christian speech and embody it, using Wittgenstein and Geertz, in order to talk about doctrine's role within the integrity of the whole of Christian belief and practice. We noted how concrete ecclesiology goes beyond postliberalism, taking its analogy between religion and cultures or languages, and turning this into a methodological partnership with hermeneutical social science. Finally, we looked at some of the tensions arising from the postliberal project as it takes shape in concrete ecclesiologies.

¹⁰⁰ See Healy's comments on Hauerwas in his 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 301–2. For critiques of concrete ecclesiologies' use of Wittgenstein, see the same article by Healy, and also Kathryn Tanner's critique of postliberals' use of Wittgenstein on rules in her *Theories of Culture* 138–43, and Christopher J Insole, 'The Truth Behind Practices: Wittgenstein, Robinson Crusoe and Ecclesiology,' *Studies in Christian Ethics* 20:3 (2007): 364–82, which is a thorough treatment of Wittgenstein on practices and his questionable use by certain ecclesiologists.

¹⁰¹ See Healy's excellent critique in this regard in 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 291–6.

¹⁰² Kathryn Tanner's incisive critique in her *Theories of Culture* of some theologians' use of culture and practices is the best guide to this. See Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 93–119.

b) *Post-Vatican II Catholic theology: nature and grace*

If we note one thing from the section preceding this one, it might be the sheer profusion of influences on concrete ecclesiology, from Barth to Wittgenstein, Geertz and MacIntyre. To this competing and confusing array of influences we will now add another set, this time from post-Vatican II Catholic theology.

I suggest it is with the Catholic influence that the general turn to the concrete becomes specifically *ecclesiological*, taking the church as its object of inquiry. It is sometimes said that ecclesiology only became a distinct area of theology after Vatican II, with its two great pastoral constitutions on the church, *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. Whether or not this assessment is accurate, the changing face of current ecclesiology owes much to the changes in Catholic theology that both fed the council's deliberations and featured so strongly in its teachings. Exploring the theological moves made at the council will help unpack its legacy for ecclesiology, and help us to discern more clearly the theological motives underlying the turn to the concrete.

Behind all the changes in ecclesiology at Vatican II lies the question of the relationship between nature and grace. Catholic theology in the modern period had relied on a strong distinction between the realms of nature and grace, such that reality had a two-layered character: '...grace appeared there as a mere super-structure, very fine in itself certainly, which is imposed on nature by God's free decree, and in such a way that the relationship between the two is no more intense than a freedom of contradiction'.¹⁰³ The two orders of grace and nature were seen as complete in themselves and, because

¹⁰³ Karl Rahner, 'Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace,' in *Theological Investigations I: God, Christ, Mary and Grace* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961) 297–317 (298).

grace was not thought to be an object of human experience, '[a] free being at least could always reject such a good without thereby having *inwardly* the experience of losing its end.'¹⁰⁴ Nature has no lack for grace to perfect or complete and human beings, therefore, have no natural desire for God. This view of nature and grace has its roots in the interpretation of Aquinas proffered by Cajetan and Suárez in the sixteenth century, whereby humans exist in a state of 'pure nature', to which God adds a supernatural end.¹⁰⁵ Aquinas' distinctions between intellect and appetite (*Summa* 1.79–80) and supernatural and natural virtues (1.2.57–58), abstracted from their place within a wider consideration of human beatitude, became rigidly understood as separate spheres, related only by God's free decision. This already difficult understanding of Aquinas was compounded by its ossification: scholastic theology was understood not only as the single authoritative mode of Catholic theology, but also as unchanging and monolithic.

It was in this context that Henri de Lubac's *Surnaturel* had such a monumental impact. De Lubac's work challenged the prevailing scholastic theology root and branch, proving not only that it had changed and developed, but also proving on that basis that modern scholasticism's interpretation of Aquinas on nature and grace was drastically inadequate. De Lubac showed that the idea of 'pure nature' was foreign to Thomas. In place of the scholastic 'two-tiered' picture of reality and of the human person, de Lubac reinstated the picture of the human person common to Bonaventure, Augustine and Aquinas: 'We are creatures, and have been given the promise that we shall see God. The desire to see him is in us, it constitutes us, and yet it comes to us as

¹⁰⁴ Rahner, 'Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace' 298.

¹⁰⁵ Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad Herder, 1998) 6–12.

a completely free gift.’¹⁰⁶ In the face of the typical scholastic objection that doing away with ‘pure nature’ destroys the gratuity of grace, de Lubac removed the opposition between the two by asserting God’s radical transcendence.¹⁰⁷ To the scholastic insistence that faith is on the level of the intellect, de Lubac answered that human beings have natural desire for God because they are created in God’s image: ‘The Creator’s power imprints a movement “deep within his creature, in the heart of the created being, at the moment of its creation”; a deep and hidden movement, which is at first different and apparently contradicted by all the surface movements, but which underlies them all.’¹⁰⁸ As Rahner puts it, ‘nature’ in the theological sense is therefore a ‘remainder concept’.¹⁰⁹

De Lubac’s two shattering challenges to scholastic theology were, first, that theology is contextual and historical, and that doctrine changes and develops over time and, second, that grace can be the object of human experience, meaning that there is no such thing as ‘pure nature’ unaffected by grace. The furore raised in Rome by de Lubac’s work led to his silencing by his superiors in 1950, with similar action also being taken against his fellow travellers in *la nouvelle théologie*, Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu. Despite this, it was the theology of this small group that won through at Vatican II just over ten years later. The fundamental shift in the relationship between nature and grace that underlies the work of these theologians resonated with the sensibilities of the council fathers. As a result, it is the same shift that underlies the council’s pronouncements on ecumenism, the church’s relation to the world and the role of the laity.

¹⁰⁶ De Lubac, *Mystery* 167.

¹⁰⁷ See *Humani Generis* §26. ‘Others [theologians] destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order, since God, they say, cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision.’

¹⁰⁸ De Lubac, *Mystery* 136. De Lubac is quoting Bérulle here.

¹⁰⁹ Rahner, ‘Concerning the Relationship Between Nature and Grace’ 313–5 (315).

So much for *la nouvelle theologie*'s impact on the council - what of the council's impact on ecclesiology? De Lubac's understanding of nature and grace, and its ramifications in terms of the council's view of the church, set up the theological momentum that has resulted in the widespread changes to ecclesiology I described at the beginning of the chapter. Exploring these in some detail will help to explain the theological heritage of concrete ecclesiologies, and highlight some of the tensions in how they are currently conceived and practiced.

De Lubac's argument that theology was subject to ebb and flow, and changed its emphases and mode of expression according to its context and audience, freed Catholic theology from the burden of constantly defending a truth perceived as static and unchanging. It also freed up Catholic theology for a more positive recognition of the contextual nature of all theological efforts – theologies could be positively contextual, arising from a specific socio-cultural context and addressed to a specific audience. In this connection, the effect of gathering thousands of bishops from across the world cannot be underestimated: each brought the concerns of their own pastoral context to the council, and each faced the challenge of bringing the council's teaching to their home dioceses. This recognition of the contextual nature of theology paved the way for the development of liberation theologies, and local theologies that challenge the Euro-American bias of academic theology. Following this acknowledgement that theology strives after truth from a particular time and place, ecclesiology has taken on a centrifugal character. That is, there is an increasing sense that ecclesiology is not useful *in spite* of its locally conditioned character, but *because*

of it.¹¹⁰ The move to contextual theologies has led to the belief that ecclesiology ought to be done primarily at a local level, in order to help local churches and congregations live faithfully in their context. This contextual, local emphasis then becomes the primary sense and first purpose of ecclesiology as a practice.

The changed relationship between nature and grace also underlies current ecclesiology in another, related way. Because, in de Lubac's scheme, grace becomes accessible to experience (albeit in a dark and mysterious way) theology can and should take human experience as a *locus theologicus*. Because humans concretely experience God, the experience of their daily lives is material for theological reflection and discernment. The implications for concrete ecclesiologies are clear: theologians ought to consider the experience of ordinary churchgoers in their work, not only because such an effort might make their ecclesiology more relevant to its audience, but because that experience in itself is a source of revelation. If the Holy Spirit is given to the whole people of God, then the experience of the whole people of God should guide theologians. When theologians seek to address a concrete ecclesial context, they are engaged in the process of discerning the concrete shape of God's grace in a particular community. Philip Endean notes the centrality of this rehabilitation of experience to Rahner's theology:

Compelled to abandon a pre-critical, naive realist metaphysics, Christian theology has had to move – or move back – talk of the experience of God from the periphery to the centre of theology. To integrate theology and spirituality in this way is not to surrender to anti-intellectualism in the name of piety, but rather to situate the academic enterprise of theology within something greater: God's ongoing self-revelation in human experience.¹¹¹

This dissolution of the boundaries between theology and spirituality is evident in Healy's call for theologians to engage in a 'practical-prophetic' kind of ecclesiology,

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985).

¹¹¹ Philip Endean, *Karl Rahner and Ignatian Spirituality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 64.

which seeks to address local congregations as its primary aim, and the academy second. It is echoed in Michael Montgomery's call for empirical studies of church congregations to be done for the congregations themselves, not just the academy.¹¹²

Finally, the changed relationship between nature and grace lies behind current ecclesiology to the extent that theological anthropology has become a proper starting point for theological reflection. Rahner places the inquiring human being at the centre of his theology, but rejects the idea that an anthropological starting point produces an atheistic result. Instead, 'precisely because the question or inquiry is theological, it points directly and self-evidently to anthropology as the horizon and presupposition of theology. Thus, the basic possibility and legitimacy of an anthropological point of departure for theology become evident, on the one hand, and its urgency, on the other.'¹¹³ Because the human person, with its supernatural existential, always has to do with God, anthropology is both a legitimate starting point and a legitimate testing ground for theological proposals.¹¹⁴

3. Cultural context

a) Introduction

So far, we have explored two theological sources of the methodological common sense of concrete ecclesiologies: postliberal theology and post-Vatican II Catholic

¹¹² Michael H Montgomery, 'Finding the Right Direction: Ecclesiology From Below', (Paper presented at the American Academy of Religion, Ecclesiological Investigations Unit, Montreal, 2009).

¹¹³ Anton Losinger, *The Anthropological Turn: The Human Orientation of the Theology of Karl Rahner*, trans. Daniel O Dahlstrom (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000) xxi.

¹¹⁴ For a brief explanation of the supernatural existential in Rahner's thought, see Stephen J Duffy, 'Experience of Grace,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 46–7.

theology. From the first, we gathered a sense of the multiple theological and philosophical influences behind the postliberal project itself, and how these impact on the turn to the concrete and take shape in concrete ecclesiologies. From the second, we saw how changes in Catholic theology's thinking about the relationship between nature and grace have opened up the possibility of looking at human experience as a *locus theologicus*. One of the challenges of exploring concrete ecclesiologies' theological roots is that the 'common sense' nature of their turn to the concrete means that the theologians involved rarely justify or explain it in any explicit way: its importance and self-evidence to the reader is, by and large, assumed. This means that the two theological stories I have told are more like aetiologies, a sort of theological 'How the Leopard Got His Spots'. These aetiologies are not found in their pure form in any particular theologian's work; they are not offered as direct explanations of any particular theological project, nor are they speculations about particular theologians' motives. They are intended to highlight two powerful movements in twentieth century theology, and suggest their impact on a methodological common sense that has yet to reflect thoroughly on its own theological provenance and warrant. As explanations of the turn to the concrete these aetiologies are incomplete, but they do not lack explanatory power.¹¹⁵ This explanatory power will become more evident as I

¹¹⁵ For example, I have not explored the relationship between the turn to the concrete and liberal Protestant practical theology. While practical theologies share the use of social science with concrete ecclesiologies, they are distinct insofar as (a) practical theologies tend to engage principally with *congregational studies*, for which see the note below, and (b) this engagement takes place in the context of discussions about theological education and the equipping of clergy with practical skills for ministry. This liberal protestant/practical theology field does occasionally merge with concrete ecclesiologies, for instance in the work of the contributors to Bass and Volf, *Practicing Theology* and Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*. See also Fulkerson, 'Theology and the Lure of the Practical: An Overview'. As there is little cross-pollination between this area of practical theology and concrete ecclesiologies, it is not a major focus of the thesis.

I have also not touched here on the relationship between congregational studies and concrete ecclesiologies. Healy's *Church, World and the Christian Life* draws on the work of Nancy Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), but subsequent cross pollination between the two fields has been less than might be expected. Despite Healy's pragmatic emphasis in that work, concrete ecclesiologies have tended to downplay the use of social science to promote church growth or to enable pastors and congregations (although see Montgomery, 'Finding

move on to explore concrete ecclesiologies in greater depth in the chapters that follow.

The two theological stories I have told are also incomplete in another, more important respect. Although each provides a good theological account of the reasons behind ecclesiology's turn to the concrete, the two accounts are very different: they rely on theological frameworks that are, if not antithetical, then certainly in tension with one another. The premises about experience in the second aetiology are inadmissible in the first; the church-world relationship adumbrated in the first aetiology sits ill with the open stance to the world in the second. The fact that two quite different theological fields have reached the same methodological conclusion should alert us to the fact that more is at play in the turn to the concrete than just the theological reasons I have outlined in these aetiologies. Ecclesiology, in fact theology as a whole, is responding to something else as well. We need to explore some of the ways in which concrete ecclesiologies emerge as a response to postmodernity, and are shaped by that relationship.

b) What to say, and how to speak

the Right Direction: Ecclesiology From Below'), and focussed on a 'value-free' engagement with ethnography (see Healy, 'Chastened Ecclesiology' 3, 13), and the use of ethnography *for its own sake*, on a theoretical rather than pragmatic level. Further, concrete ecclesiologies have engaged far more with ethnographic than sociological perspectives, with numerous suggestions that a qualitative, rather than quantitative approach, is what ecclesiologies need. For this see Scharen, 'Judicious Narratives' 127–9 and Hegstad, 'Ecclesiology and Empirical Research on the Church' 3. A recent volume edited by Patrick Kiefert addresses how theology informs congregational studies: see Kiefert, ed. *Testing the Spirits: How Theology Informs the Study of Congregations* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009).

A further field left untouched is that of Christian Anthropology, for which see Fenella Cannell, ed. *The Anthropology of Christianity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Timothy Jenkins, *The Anthropology of Christianity: Situation and Critique* (2010) forthcoming in *Ethnos*. While some of the debates of this field will be relevant in the chapters that follow, the movement itself arises from religious studies and anthropology of religion, rather than theology, and is distinct both from the general theological turn to the concrete and concrete ecclesiologies.

Concrete ecclesiologies' response to postmodernity is complicated, because postmodernity is not a whole new context – it is not as if theology fell asleep on the train and woke up a few stops too late in an entirely new and bewildering destination. Postmodernity neither replaces nor displaces modernity, but exists in a complex relationship with it, variously transforming its influences, living off its legacy, rejecting its assumptions and repeating its faults. Concrete ecclesiologies, as we shall see, exist in a similarly complex relationship with the modern ecclesiologies that are their forerunners. Paul Lakeland describes postmodernity as constituted by the interplay between the given and the novel, and we would do well to approach concrete ecclesiologies in the same vein.¹¹⁶ Concrete ecclesiologies are simultaneously produced and constrained by their relationship to modern ecclesiologies; while often articulating their objectives in contradistinction to such approaches, concrete ecclesiologies nevertheless continue to work in their shadow. Likewise, while theologians' responses to postmodernity differ widely, each is unavoidably shaped by the issues to which it responds: even the most isolationist of theological projects is already implicitly responding to postmodernity in seeing it as a threat. The complexity of the various relationships between concrete ecclesiologies and modern ecclesiologies, and between concrete ecclesiologies and postmodernity in general, will become clearer as we explore the movement further. For now, it will be helpful to sketch the issues raised by postmodernity to which concrete ecclesiologies are responding, and briefly indicate some of the ways in which that response takes shape.

¹¹⁶ Lakeland, *Postmodernity* xii.

In every age, ecclesiology faces the challenge of what to say about the church, given a certain set of social descriptors.¹¹⁷ The task is one of making sense of our doctrinal beliefs about the church – its unity, wholeness, apostolicity and so on – in a concrete context. During the Reformation, for example, the fracturing of the church meant finding new ways of talking about the church’s unity. For the Protestant theological cause, this meant emphasising the unity of the elect in the invisible church across the ages, and its manifest visibility in the beleaguered minority preserving a faithful ministry of word and sacrament. For the Catholics on the defence, this meant re-emphasising unity around the papacy. Concrete ecclesiologies today face the same task of correlating beliefs about the church with their concrete social contexts. Today, those social contexts are marked by pluralism and globalisation, secularisation or resurgent fundamentalism, extremes of poverty and wealth and a new environmental awareness, to name only a few factors.¹¹⁸ As we shall see, these contextual challenges shape what concrete ecclesiologies say about the church’s nature, purpose and mission. The challenge is to hold the truth of the church’s unity alongside its obvious disunity and the apparent stagnation of ecumenism. The challenge is to talk about the church’s holiness in an environment increasingly hostile to public religion. The challenge is to talk about apostolicity in an age where the legitimacy of every authority is questioned. Yet concrete ecclesiologies also face something more than the perennial difficulty of correlating doctrinal beliefs with social context: in the postmodern context, the challenge facing ecclesiology is not just what to say, but *how to speak at all*. Our exploration of the roots of concrete ecclesiologies will be incomplete without

¹¹⁷ A formulation for which I am indebted to David Fergusson.

¹¹⁸ See Roger Haight’s understanding of the context for his ecclesiology in Haight, *Christian Community Vol. 1* 27–35, and Gerard Mannion’s in his *Ecclesiology in Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in Our Time* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2007) 16–24.

considering the ways in which they are shaped by the *emergence of bodies* in postmodernity and the crisis of legitimacy that this produces.¹¹⁹

c) *The emergence of bodies*

the body has been curiously absent in anthropology, despite the fact that the people under study invariably have bodies. This is exactly [sic] the point: the view of people *having* bodies has made these disappear from analysis.¹²⁰

I quoted earlier Clifford Geertz talking about the ‘moral and epistemological vertigo’ that has struck culture generally in the postmodern period.¹²¹ In this section, we will explore another way of talking about the same phenomenon: the emergence of bodies. In the same way as talk of ‘having’ bodies tends to make bodies disappear from analysis (they are of less interest than the people who ‘have’ them), so many of the ways in which we have habitually talked about, say, history or medicine, has tended to obscure the ‘bodies’, or material conditions, that sustain those discourses and disciplines. In postmodernity, what we see is these bodies reappearing, or emerging, as the material conditions for the production of discourse are surfaced and deconstructed, and their self-evidence challenged.¹²² The chapter so far has already shown some of the ways this is occurring in theology. In this section, we will draw those features out more explicitly, and describe them as a response to the challenges of postmodernity.

i) *The church*

¹¹⁹ Mannion also refers to ‘crises of legitimation’, for which see Mannion, *Ecclesiology in Postmodernity* 20–2.

¹²⁰ Kirsten Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995) 80–1.

¹²¹ Geertz, *After the Fact* 128.

¹²² Foucault speaks of his project as tearing the unities formed by discourse away from their self-evidence. See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 26.

One of the things we have already noticed is the turn to the concrete, and the extent to which this occurs as a way of trying to make Christianity epistemologically self-sufficient. The idea of intratextual hermeneutics is extended from just the texts of Christianity – the Bible, doctrine and so on – to include also its concrete life, so that the Christian community becomes part of the larger ‘text’ of Christianity on which we draw to explain the significance of Christian belief and practice. This epistemological shift follows, as well as produces, the emergence of the concrete church.¹²³ That is, it arises in response to the cultural decentering of the church that is occurring in the Western postmodern context. At the same time as Christian communities find themselves numerically contracting and increasingly marginalised by the secular state, they also find themselves isolated by the receding tide of modernity’s unified epistemological project. The church *emerges* as a distinct public, or polis, with its own language, its own metanarrative, and its own standards of truth.¹²⁴ Metaphorically (and simplistically), we can think of modernity as a city, with a unified transport and communication system, where citizens speak the same language; postmodernity is more like a remote and mountainous region where, separated by mountains, each village has its own language and customs, and communication is shouting from mountain-top to mountain-top, hoping the other person can catch enough of what you say and understand the language you speak.

¹²³ ‘Philosophy does not dictate or direct culture; it mirrors it.’ Lakeland, *Postmodernity* 36.

¹²⁴ Ola Sigurdson comments interestingly on the Church of Sweden’s emergence as a social body distinct from the state in ‘The Return of the Body: Re-imagining the Ecclesiology of Church of Sweden’ in Idestrom, *For the Sake of the World* 125–45.

In the face of the decentering of the Christian community in postmodernity, as Lakeland points out, theologians tend to make a virtue out of necessity.¹²⁵ Several of the features of the turn to the concrete that we have already noted are illuminated by this analysis. First, when the church emerges as a separate public, we can see why theologians lean more heavily on the concrete church as the justification and the condition for meaningfulness of what they do. There is a renewed sense that the concrete church is the source and end of theological reflection. Second, we can see how concrete ecclesiologies' emphasis on witness develops alongside the demise of modernity's project of universal reason. With no shared understanding of the grounds of argument, or any shared way of deciding what is true or authoritative, theology's rhetorical style has shifted from argument over shared premises to demonstration. The theological task in itself, as well as theological intervention in public life, becomes the task of imaginatively replacing one world of sense with another.¹²⁶

At the same time as postmodernity causes this turn to the concrete, and the impulse for epistemological self-sufficiency, it also drastically complicates it. The questions that follow an appeal to the whole 'text' of Christian belief and practice are, 'Whose belief? Whose practice? What text?' Two major challenges arise. On one hand,

¹²⁵ Lakeland, *Postmodernity* 75. Milbank's project for example, 'accepts the isolation and incommensurability and makes it the justification for a non-dialogical assertion of superiority, like a little boy under pressure, blindly declaring, "My peaceable kingdom is bigger than your peaceable kingdom!"' (76).

¹²⁶ A good example of this is Kathryn Tanner's articulation of her method in *God and Creation*. She picks up on the general shape of a Kantian transcendental argument – the idea of *dissolving* a tension, based on a meta-level agreement – but does not offer necessary premises or conditions for the possibility of her theological discourse (23). Rather, she offers a certain way of reading Christian discourse, and a genealogy of modernity that both demonstrates the problem she addresses (tension between God's action and ours) and provides the key to its solution (radicalising the transcendence of God). Tanner recognises in *Theories of Culture* that this strategy often looks like a bad argument: 'Because the meaning of premises is often altered in these ways in the course of the argument, theological arguments are often bad arguments if assessed in strictly logico-deductive terms; they do not strictly prove anything, but transpose the ground of argument as they proceed. A bad argument is in this case, however, a good rhetorical strategy.' See Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 117.

postmodernity exposes the ways in which theological reflection on the church has hitherto been controlled by a white, male, western agenda. On the other, it draws attention to the ways in the unified object of study – the church – is produced by this agenda, through a process of exclusion and silencing. What does this mean? Any straightforward appeal to ‘the beliefs and practices of the church’ masks a whole series of decisions about whose beliefs and practices count as Christian, and whose do not. Postmodernity exposes the degree to which such decisions are mired in traditional Euro-American, white, male hegemonies which define and control which issues are seen as theologically important, what kinds of questions are viable, and even what kinds of writing and expression are acceptable.¹²⁷ We will observe in the next chapter how this affects concrete ecclesiologies, particularly in their engagement with social science. There is a strong pull towards the *local*, and away from the universal level, which is seen as general and abstract.¹²⁸ At the same time, there is evidence of theologians trying to describe the church without engaging in that process of silencing minority voices.

ii) *The theologian*

Foucault articulates three questions that his archaeological project brings to texts: ‘Who is speaking?’, ‘What site are they speaking from?’ and ‘What relation do they

¹²⁷ Orlando Espín talks in this connection about the Euro-American bias of theology, and the ‘hegemonic epistemology’ (94) of American society: ‘if we produce theology and social sciences in ways that follow the established mainstream methods, we are implicitly (and necessarily) accepting as sufficient and correct not the epistemological and ideological assumptions of our peoples but those of the dominant, hegemonic groups in American society – the very groups and ideologies that created and/or inherited those assumptions, and who are at the source of our people’s marginalization and suffering’. See Orlando O Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997) 157. Part of his project involves exploring a specifically *Latino/Latina* epistemology (see 158ff).

¹²⁸ See Mudge’s plea for post-Foucaultian forms of ecclesiology in Mudge, *Beloved Community* 137.

have to the object?’¹²⁹ It is the prevalence of questions like these that cause, alongside the emergence of the church, the emergence of the *theologian*. The theologian *is* one of the material conditions for the production of discourse. We have already seen the way in which postmodern viewpoints draw attention to the ways in which theology has been shaped by those who have typically engaged in it – white, Western men. The role of the theologian emerges as something that has historically been a position of power.

We can see concrete ecclesiologies responding to this in a number of ways. We have already seen one: what I called the ‘extension of the theological franchise’. By defining specialist and ordinary theologies as essentially the same pursuit, though with differentiated ends, academic theologians are simultaneously trying to uncouple the historical connection between power and the role of the theologian, while justifying their continued work as academic theologians by orienting it more explicitly towards the church community. There is a new awareness, as we explored above, that theologians are deeply implicated in the processes of simplification, smoothing over of exceptions, silencing and exclusion by which theological inquiry advances.¹³⁰

Another way in which we see concrete ecclesiologies responding to the emergence of the theologian is the new *visibility* of the theologian in the text itself. Where, in modernity, the knowing subject tends to be elided from the texts to produce a more objective account, we now see the theologian making regular appearances on the

¹²⁹ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 50–1.

¹³⁰ McClintock Fulkerson, for example, expresses concern over the way that theological thinking about the significance of practices can exclude those whose participation in practices is more affective than cognitive. See her critique of Miroslav Volf on this point in her Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption* 233, n.5.

textual stage as a way of explaining the relationship between knower and known.¹³¹ One of the interesting ways in which this concern for the theologian is taking shape is in a concern for personal authenticity. After suggesting that Latino theology needs to throw off the hegemonic epistemologies of the dominant Euro-American discourse, Orlando Espín begins to explore what an authentically Latino/Latina epistemology would look like: an epistemology of suffering.¹³² The question then becomes whether one can engage in authentically Latino scholarship if one does *not* share in that context of suffering.¹³³ The theologian's authority to speak – even permission to speak – is bound up in questions of personal authenticity.¹³⁴

iii) The academy

The cumulative nature of the exploration thus far means that, in exploring how the academy emerges as a body, there is not much ground left to cover. In postmodernity, the self-evidence of the academy's values, categories, epistemologies and methods of communication are called into question. In theology, as we have seen above, the challenge to the academy has largely come from liberation theologies, and remains a call for action rather than a substantive reshaping of the academy's concerns or communicative methods.¹³⁵ For the majority of theologians involved in the turn to

¹³¹ See, for example, Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption* 3–5, Healy, 'Chastened Ecclesiology' 11 in typescript. Christian Scharen argues that ecclesiology should become more autobiographical in his Christian Batalden Scharen, 'Ethnographic Notes Towards a Carnal Ecclesiology' (Paper presented at the Being Surprised by God: Embodied Ecclesiology in Local Contexts Conference, Utrecht, 2010).

¹³² Espín, *Faith of the People* 158–79.

¹³³ He writes 'We might be qualified, I would say, *only* to the degree in which we do share and participate in our people's real suffering, and to the degree in which we experience and interpret it as they do.' See Espín, *Faith of the People* 159.

¹³⁴ Isasi-Díaz offers some autobiographical information at the beginning of her *En La Lucha*, as a way of establishing the extent to which she shares the experience of those for whom she writes. See Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha* x–xi.

¹³⁵ For examples, see Espín above and also Rebecca Chopp, *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language and God* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), and Ian M Fraser, *Reinventing Theology as the People's Work* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 1980).

the concrete, the question is not so much the propriety of the *existence* of academic theology, which is defended, but its *relation* to what is now recognised as ordinary. There is an enduring sense that academic theology, its concerns, and the ways in which its inquiry typically proceeds, is useful. There is, however, a new emphasis on its usefulness in relation to a particular community. We will explore this further in the chapters that follow, but quoting here a (rather MacIntyrean) formulation from Kathryn Tanner will help to get a sense of how theologians increasingly understand their role:

sustained and explicit theological reflection helps establish Christian practices as a whole way of life by sharpening commitments; by guiding performance of Christian practices in the face of the ambiguities, disagreements, and shifting circumstances of everyday life; by contributing to the excellence of such practices by making them more meaningful and meaning-giving; and by imbuing them with a historical, contextual and theological richness that might otherwise be lost from view at any one place and time, and thereby enhancing their resourcefulness to meet the challenges of that place and time.¹³⁶

In addition, I want to suggest that concrete ecclesiologies' concern over the place of the theologian and the academy is also responding to a second factor: the laicisation of theology. We have seen how theology is now widely thought to be a cultural practice undertaken by all Christians as they reflect on faith – that is one kind of 'laicisation', and leads to reflection on the relationship between ordinary and specialised theology. The more unremarked laicisation is that specialised theology is now undertaken principally by lay people, non-ordained members of Christian churches working in academic institutions. Even sixty or seventy years ago, the picture was different: it is hard to think of an influential lay theologian amongst the members of *la nouvelle théologie* who so influenced the Council, for example. Why does this laicisation of theology make a difference? Even in the comparatively recent past, the practice of

¹³⁶ Tanner, 'Theological Reflection and Christian Practices' 234.

academic theology tended to go hand in hand with ordination. While those working as theologians may not have been pastorally active, their relationship to the church community was clear: there was an overlap of authority between the *ecclesiaicens* and those teaching in universities and seminaries. Theological authority went hand in hand with pastoral leadership of one sort or another, and the authority and place of the theologian was therefore only rarely a matter for explicit reflection. Today, while many theologians are ordained members of various denominations, theology itself has become largely a lay activity, located within the academy. Without the crossover between pastoral leadership, institutional authority and the practice of theology, theologians in our own period are faced with the need to renegotiate their relationship with the communities from which and for whom they write. Insofar as theology is knowledge and knowledge power, theological authority must become a matter for negotiated consent.

d) Summary

In this section, we have examined postmodernity's influence on the development of concrete ecclesiologies in a very general way. The intention has not been to catalogue concrete ecclesiologies' use of postmodern thinkers, but rather to see how postmodernity as an analytic standpoint can further illuminate the typical concerns and methods of concrete ecclesiologies and round out the picture we gained from the theological aetiologies. Drawing out some of the classic themes and questions of postmodernity has enabled us to see how the theologians involved in the turn to the concrete church are responding not just to theological challenges, but also to the challenge of *doing* theology in their own place and time. Our cultural climate, as well as our theological heritage, shapes the theological questions that appear for us, and

what shape they take. In this section, I have described the major question facing theologians in postmodernity as not just what to say about the church, but *how to speak*.

In short, as well as negotiating a turn to the concrete, ecclesiology is also faced with negotiating a crisis of legitimacy. These two happen alongside one another, as the crisis of legitimacy partly causes the turn to the concrete, and simultaneously radically complicates it. In the chapters that follow, we will see how concrete ecclesiologies both directly and implicitly engage with the questions raised by postmodernity – questions surrounding theologians’ authority, the ethics of representation and the priorities and methods of theological inquiry. We will also see how unconscious engagement with, and reaction to, postmodern themes causes theological difficulties. In particular, we will be looking at how ecclesiology’s use of social science brings the crisis of legitimacy into sharper focus, partly because the postmodern waves now rocking the theological academy have already broken with force over the social sciences.

4. Moving on

a) General summary

Before moving on to the work of the next chapter, it will be helpful to revisit and summarise the ground we have covered so far. At the start of the chapter, I described the rise of concrete ecclesiologies – ecclesiologies that take the ‘concrete’, historical and sinful church as their starting point – and set these in the context of a wider turn to the concrete that has been taking place for the last thirty years or so. We noted that

the general turn to the concrete sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish between what is ecclesiology, and what is simply theological appeal to the concrete church in service of, say, ethics or discussions of biblical authority. After initially defining concrete ecclesiologies, and exploring some of the ways concrete ecclesiologists articulate their concerns, we moved on to explore the roots of concrete ecclesiologies in twentieth century theology. The first story traced concrete ecclesiologies' roots in postliberal theology by looking at how Barth, Wittgenstein and Geertz meet in the work of George Lindbeck. We noted how the cumulative influences of these three leads theologians to appeal to the church's practices. We also noted some of the difficulties that arise from the way these three influences pull against one another. In the second story, we traced concrete ecclesiologies back to the changes sweeping Roman Catholic theology since Vatican II. Here we saw how changes to thinking on the relationship between nature and grace made human experience a *locus theologicus* for the first time. Finally, we set both these theological stories within a broader picture, and explored how theologians are also responding to the challenges of postmodernity.

b) The path from here

What emerges, in my account as in others, reminds me of an old Red Skelton movie, whose title I no longer remember. Skelton is a hack writer of adventure stories for boys. Pacing up and down, he is dictating to an amanuensis. "Wonder Boy was trapped in the tent. All around him were circling Indians. The prairie had been set on fire. He had no more bullets. All his food was gone. Night was coming. How would Wonder Boy get out of the tent? End of Chapter 22." A pause, while Skelton collects his thoughts. Then: "Chapter 23. After Wonder Boy got out of the tent..."¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Geertz, *After the Fact* 120.

Clifford Geertz tells this story as a way of characterising the disjunction between the anthropologist's experience in the field, and the finished work of ethnography resulting from it. Looking back, he cannot understand how he got from one to the other - there seems to be a genre missing, as he puts it. I quote it here because the story of Wonder Boy bears a good resemblance to the story we have told in this chapter, and characterises well the challenge ahead of us.

Perhaps the most notable thing about the story told thus far is the huge number of influences, both theological and cultural, that converge to produce concrete ecclesiologies' methodological common sense. At the same time, concrete ecclesiologies' thoroughly practical mindset means that the internal tensions resulting from these disparate influences are not confronted or resolved, and we will see in the following chapter that engaging with social science tends to compound the problems, rather than alleviate them. What we have begun to see in the explorations of this chapter is that concrete ecclesiologies face the problem of a 'missing genre'. We have chapter twenty-two, in that this chapter has sketched out the difficulties facing concrete ecclesiologies. We have chapter twenty-three, insofar as we have already looked at several studies that show the *promise* of this methodological common sense. What we are missing is the story of how Wonder Boy escapes the tent, or how concrete ecclesiologies negotiate the difficulties facing them. Our task from here on will be filling out that missing genre, and answering the question, 'How does Wonder Boy get out of the tent?'

The other striking thing about the story told thus far is the sheer breadth and weight of material here. In order to begin teasing out some of the problems and suggesting constructive solutions, we need to narrow our focus considerably. At the beginning

of the chapter, I talked about the ways in which theologians could learn from ethnographers a more reflexive sense of being ‘in the field’. I suggested that the stories I have told about the development of the field of concrete ecclesiologies also shed light on my reasons for being in the field. I am in the field because I share, to an extent, concrete ecclesiologies’ methodological common sense: I do hold that the ordinary, sinful, concrete church of our experience is also a place of grace and encounter with God, and that it is worthy of theological attention; I also think that ethnography may help us attend to this church (although not, as we shall see, for the same reasons as concrete ecclesiologists). And if I thereby share the predicament of Wonder Boy, I also share Skelton’s sense that Wonder Boy *does* escape the tent, and have further adventures. This shared common sense provides both the approach for the chapters that follow, and the particular focus I adopt.

As for the approach, the chapters that follow suggest that concrete ecclesiologies might need to become gentler in their claims. Earlier on, I quoted Rusty Reno’s suspicion that Barth tried to talk about God by talking about theology in a loud voice.¹³⁸ In what follows, I will also be arguing that we need to speak about ‘theology’ more softly, chastening its claims and restoring something of the stumbling, apophatic register that has waned in contemporary theology since its adoption of Barth’s confident Christian speech.¹³⁹ I will also be suggesting – for good theological as well as good ethnographic reasons – that we should speak of ‘the church’ more softly, and refrain from tying up for the concrete church an epistemological burden that it cannot bear.

¹³⁸ Reno, ‘Carnal Reality’.

¹³⁹ In this instinct, I am also a product of my age. The last twenty years have also seen increased interest in apophatic theology. See, for example, Oliver Davies and Denys Turner, eds. *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

As for the topic, in the chapter that follows we will pick up, critique and explore one of the central characteristics of concrete ecclesiologies' common sense: their use of social science. We will be pursuing concrete ecclesiologies' quest for the 'real church', asking what ecclesiology *wants* from social science, and what social science can give it. We will explore what theologians are appealing to when they talk about the 'real church', and what ethnographers mean when they talk about the 'social real'. From this critical and evaluative engagement, we will be able to move into a constructive exploration of how ethnography's conception of the social real can help ecclesiology overcome some of the tensions I have described in this chapter.

The purpose is not to press a shared common sense into an esoteric special-school outlook, nor to ensure that everyone is making the same methodological moves for the same reasons.¹⁴⁰ Nor is the purpose to develop a one-size-fits-all approach to ecclesiology, or a definitive account of how ecclesiology should engage with social science. The purpose of what follows is, first, to delineate more clearly the dangers facing concrete ecclesiologies as they undertake an imaginative and difficult interdisciplinary conversation. The second purpose is to fill out the missing genre of how Wonder Boy escapes the tent. The story I tell here is not the only possible story, and it is not intended as a normative template for future concrete ecclesiologies. Rather, the purpose of what follows is to provide a constellation of theological and ethnographic resources that will help us to navigate into new and promising landscapes.

¹⁴⁰ I have in mind Hans Frei's caution, 'Very often, especially in theology, scholars start off from shared convictions, a "common sense" in the best sense of that term, shared views and a shared sensibility, and then relentlessly pursue some element in that amalgam, untying one knot after another, until at some point a common vocabulary and a shared sensibility turn into a technical, often esoteric special-school outlook.' See Hans Frei, 'Epilogue: George Lindbeck and the *Nature of Doctrine*,' in Bruce Marshall ed., *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation With George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990) 275–82 (276).

Chapter Two: Concrete Ecclesiologies and Social Science

Introduction

In the last chapter, we described theology's recent turn to the concrete church, and the emergence of concrete ecclesiologies. Having described this emergent methodological common sense, we then explored its roots in twentieth century theology, and completed the picture by looking at how the turn to the concrete also arises in response to the challenges of postmodernity. One of the characteristics of concrete ecclesiologies we noted was their turn to the social sciences, and in particular ethnography. This turn, more than any other characteristic, exhibits most clearly the emergent methodological common sense of concrete ecclesiologies: we see a gradual rise in ecclesiological engagements with social science, from Bonhoeffer's *Sanctorum Communio* in 1930, through Marxist social analysis in the hands of liberation theologians in the 1980s, culminating in repeated calls over the past ten to fifteen years for 'theological social science' as a way of addressing the reality of the church.¹⁴¹ Calls for 'theological ethnography' (Jenkins, 1999) and 'ecclesiological ethnography' (Healy, 2000) have been answered by a rapid rise in the number of ecclesiologists undertaking fieldwork or using ethnographic methods and analyses in their work.¹⁴² We are seeing an increasing number of theologians engaged in questioning and

¹⁴¹ Lewis Mudge calls for 'depth sociology' capable of dealing with the spiritual aspects of social reality in his Mudge, *Sense of a People* 29. Michael Jenkins calls for 'theological ethnography' in *The Church Faces Death* 101. Nicholas Healy calls for 'ecclesiological ethnography' in his *Church, World and the Christian Life* 169. Neil Ormerod renews the call for properly theological forms of social science in Neil Ormerod, 'Ecclesiology and the Social Sciences,' in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Mannion and Mudge 639–54.

¹⁴² See, for example, the work of the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network. Formed in 2007, this currently 150+ strong group has been awarded a grant from the British Academy to fund five conferences exploring ethnography and ecclesiology. Two volumes of collected papers from these conferences are forthcoming in spring and autumn 2012 from William B. Eerdmans.

transforming ecclesiology, and the use of qualitative social science seems to be central to their purposes.

The purpose of this chapter is to pursue that common sense, and ask what concrete ecclesiologies are *looking* for in turning to social scientific disciplines and methods. The discussion in chapter one has already helped us to establish the historical provenance of the turn to the social sciences. In this chapter, we will pursue a more positive line of inquiry: what is it that social science is being used for? What is its *function* within ecclesiological discourse? What moves is it being used to make, or what is it accomplishing? These questions will move us beyond concrete ecclesiologies' explicit reflections on the use of social science, and help us bring to the surface some of the implicit desires, assumptions and challenges driving the methodological changes we are witnessing.

In the first section, we will explore what might be called concrete ecclesiologies' *conscious* use of social science, looking at the reasons concrete ecclesiologists give for turning to social science, and some of the ways in which it is used. In the second section, we will dig deeper into what might be called concrete ecclesiologies' *unconscious* uses of social science. Here, by examining more closely how social science is deployed in a theological context, we will be able to sketch out a fuller picture of how and why concrete ecclesiologies turn to social science. As with the last chapter, we will see that concrete ecclesiologies' use of social sciences is a result of multiple influences and mixed motives, not all of which are available on the surface for reflection. Therefore, in the third section, we will look at some of the theological and methodological difficulties at work in concrete ecclesiologies' current use of social

science. This critique will help us to identify the areas needing ethnographic and theological attention in subsequent chapters.

1. What do concrete ecclesiologies want?

The question for the first section, then, is 'What do concrete ecclesiologies want?' What is it that they are looking for in turning to social science? The explorations of the last chapter have already given us some sense of why this methodological common sense has developed. There we saw that concrete ecclesiologies want to be more practical, and for their theological reflection on the church to be rooted in reality rather than idealism. We also saw that the turn to the concrete owed something to the postliberal drive for epistemological self-sufficiency, and to the post-Vatican II Catholic desire to see human experience as a *locus theologicus*. In this section, we will deepen and develop that analysis, by looking at five aspects of concrete ecclesiologies' use of social science. In each case, we will also note some features of concrete ecclesiological language, and how concrete ecclesiologies express their reasons for turning to social science.

a) Concrete shape and identity

The primary object of ecclesiology is the historical organization that has a historical life; to understand it, one must attend to it. Against the background of an ecclesiology that is abstract, idealist, and a-historical, an ecclesiology from below is concrete, realist and historically conscious.¹⁴³

This is how Roger Haight begins his three-volume treatment of the church, *Christian Community in History*. The link between this statement about the church and

¹⁴³ Haight, *Christian Community Vol. 1* 4–5.

Haight's subsequent method is clear, even commonsensical: the church is historical, the church is socially real – so why wouldn't an ecclesiological inquiry make use of social science? The first thing to note about concrete ecclesiologies' use of social science is its *pragmatism*. We have already seen that concrete ecclesiologies do not found their methodological turn on an extended theoretical or theological consideration of what the church *is*.¹⁴⁴ Rather, what we see in concrete ecclesiologies is a common sense that the concrete shape of the church, its visible nature, has theological significance.¹⁴⁵ Concrete ecclesiologies need a way of describing identity, attending to experience and analysing how communities function within their cultural contexts, and anthropology is ready to hand. But for some adjustments to anthropology's traditional methodological atheism, to create theological forms of social science, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Appropriating anthropology and ethnography seems to be a natural step for a discipline seeking to be more engaged in the empirical and more contextually self-aware.

Social science is also pragmatically helpful in another sense. We have seen how concrete ecclesiologies advocate a close relationship between ecclesiological reflection and ordinary ecclesial life. Ecclesiological reflection should help church communities to become more faithful to their Lord, and should help them address problems in

¹⁴⁴ The editors of *Converging on Culture* also note the lack of explicit reflection on theology's turn to using resources appropriated from cultural studies. See ed. Brown et al, *Converging on Culture* vi.

¹⁴⁵ Healy writes, 'Christianity can be adequately understood only if one gives an account of its local, concrete forms to complement broader, more generalizing descriptions.' See his 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 117. Jeff Astley, advocating the use of empirical research into 'ordinary theology', writes, 'The general assumption behind my position is that truth claims about empirical reality, particularly the empirical reality represented by human beings and their individual and social behaviour, have some relevance for truth claims in theology and therefore must be taken account of in theological discussion. This...ought to be accepted for those parts [of theology] that attempt a theological account of the nature of human beings and of human society (including the church). This should be no more controversial than arguing that the doctrine of creation needs to take account of scientific claims about evolution and cosmology...' See Astley, *Ordinary Theology* 105–6.

their own life of discipleship and witness.¹⁴⁶ Ethnography helps here because, as Chris Scharen points out, it helps us recognise that there are multiple kinds of churches and multiple kinds of faithfulness.¹⁴⁷ Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, ethnography can help us to create ‘thicker’ descriptions of different churches’ lives of discipleship and witness in their concrete contexts, and then reflect theologically on these descriptions.¹⁴⁸ Paying close ethnographic attention to communities in this way can help theologians understand and describe the nature of the gaps between beliefs and practices.¹⁴⁹ In some concrete ecclesialogists’ work, this pragmatic use of social science extends to *empowering* congregations. For Michael Montgomery, for example, ‘ecclesiology from below’ is not just about balancing theological talk about the church with empirical talk – it is about using social science to empower congregations in their lives of discipleship.¹⁵⁰

b) Attention to experience

In very recent years, some concrete ecclesialogists have become more cautious about the use of ecclesiological ethnography for congregational development. The idea that ecclesialogists can use ethnographic study to help churches be more faithful is waning

¹⁴⁶ See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 38 and Kathryn Tanner’s example of a professional theologian at work in ‘Theological Reflection and Christian Practices’ 240–2.

¹⁴⁷ See Christian Bataalden Scharen, ‘Judicious Narratives’ 133.

¹⁴⁸ A good example is Gilbert I Bond’s chapter, ‘Liturgy, Ministry and the Stranger: The Practice of Encountering the Other in Two Christian Communities,’ in ed. Bass and Volf, *Practicing Theology* 137–56. The expression ‘thick description’ comes from Gilbert Ryle, via Clifford Geertz. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1973) 6.

¹⁴⁹ See for example Amy Plantinga Pauw, ‘Attending to the Gaps Between Beliefs and Practices,’ in ed. Bass and Volf, *Practicing Theology* 33–50.

¹⁵⁰ Montgomery criticises the work of McClintock Fulkerson in this respect, saying that there is a difference between empowering academics and empowering congregations. He also writes of Healy’s *Church, World and the Christian Life*, ‘What was called for were not more and better models of what to do, but ecclesiological maps that empowered congregations to locate themselves in Christian history and within the options of the Christian faith, to empower the congregations as theologians. Implicit in his call for theological maps was a relocation of agency from the academy (and, dangerously, from the magisterium [sic]?) to the congregation or parish. They need to be empowered as constructive theologians, making decisions as to how to lead their practices of the Christian faith. Ecclesiologies must be constructed from the bottom up.’ See Michael H Montgomery, ‘Finding the Right Direction’ 3.

somewhat: apart from the fact that it raises questions about the power relationships between ecclesialogists and congregations, it also enlists ecclesiology in the modernist myth that things (in this case the church) are always progressing and improving – or at least ought to be doing so.¹⁵¹ There is now greater emphasis on the usefulness of ethnographic study of congregations for its own sake, rather than for promoting faithfulness or church growth, or even empowering congregations. Alongside this, there is a developing sense of the importance of *experience* for ecclesiology. Two things are notable here. The first is that concrete ecclesiological rhetoric equates the real church with the church of experience. That is, if we experience the church as confused and confusing, that is how the church actually is.¹⁵² The real church is not something behind or above or beyond the church of potluck dinners and endless meetings – the real church *is* the church of experience.¹⁵³ Concrete ecclesiologies take their task to be asking how the church of faith is present in experience.¹⁵⁴ Ethnography presents itself as a useful tool for engaging this experience and asking how the church of faith is present in it.

¹⁵¹ Comments to this effect were made at the conference of the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network in Aberdeen, in March 2009. See also Michael Montgomery's cautions in Montgomery, 'Finding the Right Direction' 7 and also Healy, 'Chastened Ecclesiology' 13. Here Healy acknowledges that, while the congregational development side of concrete ecclesiologies is important and worthwhile, his own work has moved on to considering how ethnography might affect theological claims about the church.

¹⁵² Healy writes, '...in general ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than orientated to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is.' See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 3.

¹⁵³ My language here is indebted to Stanley Hauerwas, who refers to potluck dinners in 'The Servant Community' 383, and Michael Jenkins' reference to endless meetings in *The Church Faces Death* 73. Although saying that what we experience is real sounds obvious, and is treated by concrete ecclesialogists as a straightforward claim, it is ecclesialogically contentious. Some classic ecclesialogy, for example, would maintain that *in spite* of our experience of the church's sinfulness, the church is *really* holy: the church's deepest and most essential reality is not necessarily open to our experience.

¹⁵⁴ Harald Hegstad, 'Ecclesialogy and Empirical Research' 3. Jenkins captures the difference well in saying, '...essential "churchness" is unworthy of our seeking while "church" is essential to our life of faith.' Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 80.

The second notable thing is *how* concrete ecclesiologies use ethnography to engage with experience. What we see here is an emphasis on the *irreducibility* of experience, and on the use of ethnography to preserve that irreducibility. One of the reasons concrete ecclesiologies tend to draw on qualitative, rather than quantitative, social science, is a concern to preserve people's experience in all its complexity and variety. Because of this emphasis on small-scale social science, theologians using large-scale or quantitative analysis come in for some criticism.¹⁵⁵ For some theologians, preserving the irreducibility of experience means using ethnography to look at *individual* experience. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz's use of ethnography in her attempt to articulate a *mujerista* theology. In place of the false universalism of 'official' church and 'official' theology, Isasi-Díaz uses the particular voices of Latinas to '...point to the universal by being as specific as possible'.¹⁵⁶ Ethnography becomes part of a liberative praxis: Isasi-Díaz's ethnographic interviews are designed to heighten Latina's sense of agency, and her almost word-for-word transcription of those interviews is intended to give Latinas a voice.¹⁵⁷ She writes of her chosen method, 'The purpose of knowledge synthesis is not to examine what the women say to the point where the analysis and not the lived-experience of Latinas becomes central to the theological enterprise, but to allow the voices of Latinas to be heard because they have the right to be heard.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Christian Scharen's critique of Robin Gill in Scharen, 'Judicious Narratives': Scharen wants to attend to real Christian who go to real churches, not generic Christians who go to generic churches 127–9. See also Healy's critique of Roger Haight in Healy, 'An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?' (Paper presented at the Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Learning to be Church Together Conference, Durham, 2009) 2. Jeff Astley defends the use of quantitative studies in his *Ordinary Theology* 99–100.

¹⁵⁶ Ada María Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004) 81.

¹⁵⁷ Isasi-Díaz's decision to present the voices of Latinas almost unedited in her work reflects her conclusion that '...the conceptual frameworks and epistemological presuppositions of the world of theology cannot hold the meaning of our daily lives and concerns, knowledge and understandings of the divine without distorting them.' Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha* 82.

¹⁵⁸ Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha* 105. Isasi-Díaz uses a mixture of ethnography and 'meta-ethnography' to present the experience of her interviewees. The interviews focussed on questions designed to highlight how the women involved made decisions in their lives. The practice of meta-ethnography then brings

Concern for the irreducibility of experience is also evident in those ecclesiologists whose work foregrounds the turn to the communal rather than the individual subject. Christian Scharen argues that there must be different kinds of faithfulness, and that a generic definition of faithfulness is not useful, and Kathryn Tanner seeks to move away accounts of church unity that depend on the search for generalities, or a continuous ‘essence’.¹⁵⁹ This springs from her determination that the particularity of different forms of church must not be smoothed over in the interests of unity: we must come up with different ways of explaining unity that preserve historical particularity and irreducibility.¹⁶⁰ There is a sense not just that looking at the particular balances out ecclesiology’s tendency toward generalisations, but that attention to the irreducibly particular is somehow the *key* to ecclesiology.¹⁶¹

c) *Balancing talk about the church*

Concrete ecclesiologists also talk about using qualitative social science as a way of *balancing* talk about the church. The most interesting thing to note here is the way in which this need for balance is expressed in Christological terms. Healy describes the dangers of an overly theological or idealist picture of the church in terms of

the interviews together, finds commonalities and differences between them, and uses this ‘knowledge synthesis’ to produce ‘generative themes’. This process of knowledge synthesis works by holding the differences and similarities between accounts side by side, without collapsing them into one another: instead of saying ‘Olivia and Lupe mean the same thing when they say...’, we say ‘Olivia’s experience is similar to Lupe’s except that...’ (86–7).

¹⁵⁹ See Tanner’s chapter on commonalities in Christian practice in *Theories of Culture* 120–55.

¹⁶⁰ Thus the church’s unity across time and space is a unity of *engagement*: see Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 152, and my comments on this in chapter four, 203–5. Michael Jenkins has a similar emphasis on the historical plurality of the church: see Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 58–63.

¹⁶¹ Michael Jenkins argues that ‘the creative potential to expand our understanding of the church lies not in reading into the church’s history a uniformity (or, even, a harmony) that was never there and trying to develop taxonomies that reflect only this nonexistent uniformity (or harmony). Rather, it lies in detecting the places of paradox and contradiction in our theoretical categories, in describing their nature, and in pressing them further.’ Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 64.

'ecclesiological Nestorianism' or 'ecclesiological Monophysitism'.¹⁶² Jinkins makes the same point using a different heresy, by warning of the dangers of 'ecclesiological Docetism'.¹⁶³ Like Christological language, ecclesiological language needs to be carefully balanced, to avoid the risk of over-emphasising one aspect of its reality at the expense of another. Christological language also illustrates for us how concrete ecclesiologies see the challenge of describing the church. Christ's humanity and divinity are not two separate realities existing side by side, which we must subsequently reconcile: they are two natures of a single person, a single subject both fully human *and* fully divine.¹⁶⁴ There is no competition between the divine and human natures of the Word made flesh; likewise, there ought to be no competition between empirical and transcendent in the Body of Christ. Concrete ecclesiologies' task is therefore akin to the Christological task: we must be able to look at the concrete church and see there a subject both wholly empirical and wholly theological. Concrete ecclesiologies do not ask how the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church of faith can be *reconciled* with the church of concrete experience, but how the former is present in and revealed by the latter.¹⁶⁵

We should note two things about the way concrete ecclesiologies call upon social science for balance in connection with the Christological analogy. The first is that the Christological analogy suggests that concrete ecclesiologies see their task as balancing

¹⁶² Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 75.

¹⁶³ Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 73.

¹⁶⁴ My wording here is indebted to Schillebeeckx, who talks about 'pseudo-problems' building up in theology around the questions of human reality and the reality of grace. See his Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1990) 211. The Christological theme is also evident in Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 92. Kathryn Tanner's work is characterised by an emphasis on non-competitive relations between God and creation, first developed in her *God and Creation in Christian Theology*. For this emphasis in a Christological setting, see her Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

¹⁶⁵ This fact explains concrete ecclesiologies' frequent emphasis on the church's *sinfulness*: as there is no other church more real than the one we experience, ecclesial sin must be taken with theological seriousness. For this emphasis, see Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 10 and Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 38.

two languages to describe an external, objective reality.¹⁶⁶ The real church is ‘out there’, and it can be more or less well described. The reality of the church – the reality we *experience* – can be ignored, distorted, idealised and so on. Ethnography is used as a way of getting at that ‘real’ church and balancing out our talk about it. The second point of note is that this use of Christological ways of characterising the task of ecclesiology occurs alongside an interest in the individual body, or moral agent, as an analogy for the church. We see this tacit analogy at work in the prevalence of language about the church as *agent*, or body-in-life.¹⁶⁷ Jonas Ideström’s *Lokal Kyrklig Identitet* is a particularly clear example of this. His inquiry into the identity of the local church, focussed on a church in suburban Stockholm, is founded on an analogy of the church as body.¹⁶⁸ In order to inquire about the church as *social* body, Ideström draws on the organisational theory of Niklas Luhmann, who defines an organisation as a form of social system where communication is made up of *decisions*.¹⁶⁹ The initial analogy of ‘body’ goes hand in hand with a focus on agency. The ‘body’ with which the analogy is drawn is an *individual*, not a social body, an individual self whose identity is created by its decisions, actions and impositions on the world.¹⁷⁰ The same quiet analogy of the church as body is also visible in some

¹⁶⁶ While Johannes van der Ven does not use the Christological analogy, he does draw on the idea of social science and theology as two languages describing a single object, for which see Johannes A van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1996) 87. The church’s functions can be described in either exclusively social scientific (87–90) or exclusively religious language (91–2); the key is to balance them (93). Van der Ven writes, ‘ecclesiology should be developed proceeding from the coordination of the social and religious aspects of the functions of the church.’ (98, author’s emphasis).

¹⁶⁷ Healy references Schleiermacher’s characterisation of the church as a ‘moral person with an individual life’. See Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 1. The social body analogy is also characteristic of the contributors to Ideström, ed. *For the Sake of the World*: see Ola Sigurdson’s comments in ‘The Return of the Body: Re-imagining the Ecclesiology of Church of Sweden’, 125–45.

¹⁶⁸ Ideström, *Lokal Kyrklig Identitet* 36–40, 251–5.

¹⁶⁹ Ideström, *Lokal Kyrklig Identitet* 275.

¹⁷⁰ Though the analogy leans heavily on the side of the individual body as moral agent, some theologians have a sophisticated sense of the body as constructed by, and permeable to, the influences of society. McClintock Fulkerson draws on the work of Pierre Bourdieu to make this move. See her ‘“We don’t see colour here.”: A Case Study in Ecclesial-Cultural Intervention,’ in ed. Brown et al, *Converging on Culture* 140–157. William Cavanaugh also distinguishes between individual and social

ecclesiologies that focus on the significance of practices for an account of the concrete church.¹⁷¹ In these ecclesiologies we can see an operative analogy of the church as an individual moral agent, whose identity is shaped by practices.¹⁷² Likewise, the same analogy with the embodied individual also underlies concrete ecclesiologies that focus, in a more Wittgensteinian way, on what communities ‘say’ in their social context.¹⁷³ We will explore the connection between these two points – balancing language about an objective ‘real church’, and the church as body – more critically in a later section.

d) Particular and local

Concrete ecclesiologies also use social science to make a turn to the *particular and local*. One of the interesting things about concrete ecclesiologies is the degree to which their methodological common sense remains untroubled by – and largely not engaged with – major debates over the propriety of using social scientific language. Why not? Such debates are often concerned with the church as an object of *belief*. The question that then arises is which language, theological or social-scientific, is best suited to describing ‘church’ in general. If ‘church’ is primarily an object of faith, social science cannot have anything authoritative to say about the church.¹⁷⁴ Concrete

bodies in his William Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) 17.

¹⁷¹ Gerard Mannion’s attempt to develop a ‘virtue ecclesiology’, despite its vocal criticisms of Hauerwas, stands in continuity with a whole series of ecclesiologies influenced by the MacIntyrean return to virtue in modern ethics. See Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology in Postmodernity* 192–215.

¹⁷² Nicholas Healy suggests that it is not unreasonable ‘to describe the concrete church, at least initially, more in terms of agency than in terms of being. Its identity is constituted by action. That identity is thoroughly theological, for it is constituted by the activity of the Holy Spirit, without which it cannot exist. But it is also constituted by the activity of its members as they live out their lives of discipleship.’ See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 5. Stanley Hauerwas argues that the difference between church and world is not an ontological difference, but the difference between agents. See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* 101.

¹⁷³ Mudge, *Sense of a People* 138–41 and Mudge, *Beloved Community* 13.

¹⁷⁴ Joseph Ratzinger, for example, argues that the church is ‘not ours, but his [Christ’s]’, and this means that ‘Behind the *human* exterior stands the mystery of a *more than human* reality, in which reformers,

ecclesiologies, by contrast, are interested in the church of experience, the church *in particular*. Although the task of concrete ecclesiology does involve using two (potentially) mutually exclusive academic languages side by side, and to some extent balancing their claims, it is not focussed on ‘church’ as an abstract category. As Jinkins puts it, ‘...essential “churchness” is unworthy of our seeking while “church” is essential to our life of faith.’¹⁷⁵

The way in which concrete ecclesiologies define themselves in opposition to modern ecclesiologies occasionally makes it sound as though modern ecclesiologies’ problem is that they are too *theological*, and that rebalancing our approach to the church means becoming more empirical – hence the turn to social science. But not every ecclesiology that makes use of social science is necessarily ‘concrete’, a point that comes up clearly in responses to Roger Haight’s attempt to construct an ‘ecclesiology from below’ in his *Christian Community in History*.¹⁷⁶ Healy argues that Haight’s work is only concrete to a limited degree,

since he must pick and choose from amongst the confusions and complexities of real life to generate his account of trends and isolate general ecclesiological principles...In order to present an orderly and comprehensible account, they [sic] must select the usual experience of the majority rather than describe the plural experiences of the minorities, and smooth away the exceptional as but a proof of the rule.¹⁷⁷

Healy argues that by refusing to start with doctrine, Haight risks prioritising other large accounts of human experience: social theories, or the hegemony of one particular

sociologists, organizers have no authority whatsoever.’ See Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (Leominster: Fowler Wright, 1985) 46–48.

¹⁷⁵ Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 80.

¹⁷⁶ Neil Ormerod criticises Haight along the same lines in his Ormerod, ‘Ecclesiology’ 648–49.

¹⁷⁷ Healy, ‘An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?’ 2. Healy makes the same criticism in his ‘Ecclesiology and Practical Theology’ 121–2, but adds here that Haight’s ‘smoothing over’ in this way is reasonable.

group's experience.¹⁷⁸ The real bogeyman for concrete ecclesiologies is not being too theological, but being too general.

e) *Chastening claims*

The final way in which concrete ecclesiologies deploy social science is to *chasten* claims about the church. Ethnography is used to chasten ecclesiology in two respects. The first is with regard to its *social* claims about the church. The turn to the concrete that we noted in chapter one, with its emphasis on epistemological self-sufficiency, placed a fair amount of weight on the church's practices and social distinctiveness. The suggestion here is that ethnographic attention to Christian communities shows that they *cannot* support such claims, that the church fundamentally is not like that, or does not practice in that way. Both Healy and Tanner point out the degree to which borrowing language of culture and practice to emphasise Christian social distinctiveness trades on a church/world distinction that does not inhere in reality.¹⁷⁹ Healy also criticises the degree to which many proponents of what he calls 'the new ecclesiology' *idealise* practices. By so doing, they do not take account of the ways in which practices are misperformed and misunderstood.¹⁸⁰ Both Healy and Tanner are supportive of the use of cultural theory and ethnography in ecclesiology, but they are also clear that these disciplines should be used to present an accurate picture of the church's social reality – which is not one theologians necessarily want to see.

¹⁷⁸ See Healy, 'An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?' 2. Healy argues here that empirical or concrete studies of church *do* need to be rooted in doctrine, because only doctrine stipulates the conditions of the possibility of being church, and establishes its nature and function. See also similar comments in his 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 122. The Dutch practical theologian Johannes van der Ven also argues that 'Empirical facts are meaningful only when they are placed within a hermeneutic context of theological concepts and theories and evaluated from within that context.' See Johannes A van der Ven, *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach*, trans. Barbara Schultz (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993) 153.

¹⁷⁹ See Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 293–4 and Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 96–102.

¹⁸⁰ Healy, 'Misplaced Concreteness?' 294–5.

The second use of ethnography is to chasten *theological* claims about the church.¹⁸¹ Healy argues, following Webster and Schillebeeckx, that what we need is ‘negative ecclesiology, church theology in a minor key’.¹⁸² Ethnography fits into this negative ecclesiology by prompting ‘revisions of traditional claims the church makes about itself, theological claims as well as empirical...I want to say that ethnography supports and to some extent guides such a chastening of the church’s doctrinal self-understanding.’¹⁸³ The suggestion now is that modern ecclesiology’s doctrinal claims, and indeed postliberal appeals to the church as a distinctive community, are overconfident and in need of cutting down to size. Positive ecclesiology needs to be followed by a negative, perhaps more humble, kind of ecclesiology, in which ethnography plays a key role.¹⁸⁴

2. *How is social science being used?*

So far, I have drawn out five ways in which concrete ecclesiologies use social science, by looking at what concrete ecclesiologists engaged in such interdisciplinary borrowing say about what they do. We have seen how qualitative social science is

¹⁸¹ Louis-Marie Chauvet suggests scientific anthropology can be of critical and theological service to theology: critical because it forces theologians to flush out their theological prejudices and review their paradigms, and theological because ‘practising or frequenting anthropology requires them [theologians] to rethink from scratch a certain number of classical questions within theology.’ See ‘When the Theologian Turns Anthropologist’ in ed. Sweeney et al, *Keeping Faith in Practice* 148–62 (159).

¹⁸² Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 2. He is quoting Schillebeeckx, *Church* xiii.

¹⁸³ Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 1–2. Healy gives an example of how empirical study might chasten doctrinal claims about authority. In the Roman Catholic church, there is some talk of a ‘crisis of authority’ – the faithful are not conforming to centralized church teaching on various moral issues, and church authorities blame ‘cafeteria Catholicism’ and a culture of consumerism and individualism. Healy suggests that ‘...it may be that the crisis is due more to the failure of the authorities to recognize and adequately address the way the Christian life is actually lived.’ He suggests empirical study should prompt a massive reconsideration of the doctrine of teaching authority: ‘It may be that the doctrine is at present distorted by an assumption that the Holy Spirit works to bring conformity rather than rich complexity and experimentation.’ See Healy, ‘Ecclesiology and Practical Theology’ 127.

¹⁸⁴ Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 2; see also Healy, ‘An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?’ 4.

used to balance and chasten talk about the church, making it more particular, local and experiential, and also making ecclesiology more pragmatically helpful. I have also drawn attention to some of the implicit features of concrete ecclesiologies' engagement with social science: the way they express the challenge of balancing two languages about an external reality in Christological terms, and the quiet analogy between the church and the body-in-life that underlies the turn to the concrete church. Already, we are beginning to see something of the variety of reasons that concrete ecclesiologists have for turning to social science.

In the introduction, I noted that one of the characteristics of the critical analysis in this thesis would be attention to the 'unconscious' of concrete ecclesiological discourse. Concrete ecclesiologies, as we have already seen, do not often reflect explicitly on their theological or cultural influences. This means that if we are to answer the question with which we began this chapter, 'What do concrete ecclesiologies want?', we need to look beyond concrete ecclesiologists' explicit rationales for using social science. We need to situate concrete ecclesiologies in the cultural context I explored in chapter one, and ask what *function* social science is performing for ecclesiologists, and what theological work it is doing. In this section, we will look at two ways in which social science seems to be being used unconsciously by theologians: as a means of encounter, and as a site of resistance. We will then move on to draw out some of the difficulties in concrete ecclesiologies' use of social science in the section that follows.

a) Means of encounter

What is it that concrete ecclesiologies *want*? What is it that they are looking for in turning to social science? So far, we have seen that concrete ecclesiologies are not just

seeking empirical language with which to describe the church as concrete and historical, for they recognise that social theories can be just as abstract as theological theories. We have also noted concrete ecclesiologies' use of incarnational/body of Christ language: repeated calls for ecclesiological language to be balanced in the same way as Chalcedonian Christ-language, suggestions that ecclesiology become more incarnational, less Docetic, and so on. But who or what is it that is becoming incarnate here? What change is being called for? It is not that the church needs to become more incarnate, for it has always involved humans. It is partly that *theology* needs to become more incarnate, reflecting in its language more of the human reality of the church. Instead of a Platonic approach that starts from the primacy of a universal idea, or that argues over the nature of the church's ideal form, what is being called for is an Aristotelian approach that sees the essential nature of the church as existing in and through concrete reality.¹⁸⁵ Concrete ecclesiologies' use of incarnational and Christological language also signifies its belief that *the theologian* should be becoming more incarnate.¹⁸⁶ The theologian is the one whose interests need to come back down to earth, and who must learn to root her reflection in the 'real church', in experience, in lives actually lived. It is this incarnational instinct, I think, that lies at the root of concrete ecclesiologies' turn to ethnography, rather than

¹⁸⁵ My language here is indebted to Walter Kasper, 'On the Church'.

¹⁸⁶ Chris Scharen, for example, became doubly trained in ethnography and theology in order to make sense for himself of the 'yawning gap between the thrilling intersection of vibrant communal worship and work for justice and the frankly boring recital of dry biblical, historical and theological data seemingly hovering above history required of us, so it felt at the time, as a kind of professional hazing required as much for its inscription of distinction—a class marker painfully achieved for those ascending to the pulpit and altar—as for any practical use in ministry.' See Christian Batalden Scharen, 'Ethnographic Notes Towards a Carnal Ecclesiology' (Paper presented at the Being Surprised by God: Embodied Ecclesiology in Local Contexts, Utrecht, 2010) 3. The arrival narrative at the beginning of McClintock Fulkerson's *Places of Redemption* (3–5) is also the story of a theologian becoming incarnate. She writes, 'From overly cognitive and orthodox definitions of Christian faithfulness to concepts of practice that ignore the contribution of bodies and desire, prominent theological options risk overlooking both the worldly way that communities live out their faith and the worldly way that God is among us.' (6).

to quantitative forms of social science. Part of the desire here is to be, as Tim Jenkins puts it, ‘committed in the body’.¹⁸⁷ The question we need to answer now is: why?

Back in chapter one, we looked at some of the cultural dynamics underlying the development of concrete ecclesiologies, and I talked about the ‘emergence of bodies’. As the unified epistemological project of modernity has receded, theologians have found themselves having to re-negotiate their relationship to the church, both justifying their existence in relation to the church as a distinct public, and justifying their function in relation to the church’s life. Finding themselves isolated in the academy by the same receding tide, theologians have also begun to argue that Christian theology can and should be explained on its own terms, rather than (as Bruce Marshall puts it), borrowing its truth claims from other intellectual or cultural quarters.¹⁸⁸ Ethnographic engagement with church communities provides a way for theologians to reconnect with the Christian public that they appeal to as the source and end of their theological reflection.¹⁸⁹ It also gives theologians a way of lending practical force to their belief that theology is a practice undertaken by all Christians, not just by specialists – it allows theologians to *listen* to ordinary theology.

¹⁸⁷ Timothy Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork and the Perception of Everyday Life,’ *Man* 29 (1994): 433–55 (451). See Chris Scharen’s comments on his own apprenticeship as an ethnographer: ‘Positing that Bourdieu is right that “we learn by body” I have pursued studies that position the worshipper and in a broader sense the congregation as a whole not merely as object to be understood, as perhaps a part of the burgeoning sociology or theology *of* the body, but also *from* the body, requiring submitting myself to the painful apprenticeship in context that allows forging the corporal and mental dispositions that make up the competent worshipper within the crucible of congregational life.’ Scharen, ‘Ethnographic Notes’ 1 (*italics in original*).

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Bruce Marshall, quoted in Gary Dorrien, ‘The Future of Postliberal Theology,’ *Christian Century* July 18th–25th (2001): 22–29. I am using an online copy, for which no pagination is available.

¹⁸⁹ Concrete ecclesiologists sometimes appeal to people’s experience as a way of anchoring the theological nature of their studies. Roger Haight states that *Christian Community in History* is a theological as well as an historical study because the church’s history was *experienced* religiously or theologically. The church’s experience, rather than an abstract doctrinal starting point, is what makes his study theological. See Haight, *Christian Community Vol. 1* 5. In a similar vein, Joseph Komonchak writes, ‘If the church is the People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, it is all of these things as a human reality, that is, because certain events occur within the mutually related consciousness of a group of human beings.’ See Joseph A Komonchak, ‘Ecclesiology and Social Theory: A Methodological Essay,’ *The Thomist* 45:2 (1981): 262–83 (274–5). Johannes van der Ven makes the same move in van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* 106–7.

At least in some ways, then, we could say that ethnography is being used to shore up Christian theology's epistemological self-sufficiency. Intriguingly, ethnography is also simultaneously being used to undermine it. Postliberal attempts to give Barth 'hands', as Tracy put it, mean that fairly robust claims are often made about the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian community.¹⁹⁰ We saw earlier on in the chapter that ethnography is used to puncture some of these more inflated claims for Christian practices. Additionally, greater awareness of the way in which academic theology's priorities and claims have been shaped by the experience of its chief practitioners (white, Western, ordained men) leaves some theologians looking for ways to include the theological views of those whose experience academic and ecclesiastical theology has often marginalised. Ethnography seems a good way of encountering those viewpoints - and we will go on now to talk about how those viewpoints are deployed.

b) Site of resistance

Earlier in the analysis, I remarked that concrete ecclesialogists occasionally talked in ways that suggested that the task of concrete ecclesialogies was to balance the claims of two languages, theological and social scientific, in order to arrive at an accurate picture of the concrete church. Several of the features we have described, however, suggest that this is not yet enough of an explanation. We have seen the way concrete ecclesialogies are concerned to preserve the *irreducibility* of experience. We have seen that their turn to social science is not just a turn to the empirical, but to the *local, particular and experiential*. We have also seen in this connection that a grand-scale

¹⁹⁰ David Tracy, 'Lindbeck's New Programme for Theology: A Reflection,' *The Thomist* 49 (1985): 460-72 (465).

rapprochement between theology and social science is not concrete ecclesiologies' primary task. What we have seen, I suggest, is social science being deployed not just as a way of *balancing* talk about the church, but also as a way of '...jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal.'¹⁹¹ Social science is being used to found *sites of resistance*. Social science is used to deploy examples of the irreducibly particular in order to 'jam the theoretical machinery', or resist the metanarratives that exclude or marginalise various ecclesial perspectives – especially those of the global church, and those of laypeople and women. We will look at a few examples of this, and then go on to ask about which 'metanarratives' are being disrupted.

Earlier on, I drew attention to Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz's use of ethnography in her *En la Lucha*. There, we saw her using ethnography to foreground particular experience and individual voices. She uses ethnography to prioritise lived-experience and popular religiosity, as a way of resisting the Euro-American orthodoxies, both academic and ecclesial, that keep Latina women on the margins.

By using our lived experience as a source of *mujerista* theology, we are trying to validate our world, our reality, our values. We are trying to reverse the schizophrenia that attacks our lives by insisting that who we are and what we do is revelatory of the divine.¹⁹²

Isasi-Díaz uses Latina voices to call into question the truths of white, Euro-American academic discourse.¹⁹³ Likewise, McClintock Fulkerson uses attention to disability and race to draw attention to the ableism and racism that underlie the liberal church's

¹⁹¹ A phrase of Luce Irigaray's. See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985) 78.

¹⁹² Isasi-Díaz, *En La Lucha* 91.

¹⁹³ Orlando Espín begins his theological reflections on popular Catholicism with Latino popular devotion to the *Virgen*, in order to challenge the Tridentine 'orthodoxies' that would correct or quash it. See Espín, *Faith of the People* 7–10.

claim that ‘We don’t see colour here’.¹⁹⁴ Haight uses social science to found a starting point that challenges ‘ecclesiologies from above’ by prioritising historical consciousness, global perspectives, the experience of women and ecumenical and interreligious perspectives.¹⁹⁵ Haight’s robust sense of the historical nature of the church demands such a method, but his starting point in history and social science is not just determined by how he conceives the object of ecclesiological enquiry. Rather, Haight’s starting point in social science is about founding a site of resistance, and it is driven by frustration with the institutional structures that shape and generate the kind of ecclesiologies he criticises. Each of these thinkers uses social science to introduce into the theological conversation people and perspectives that disrupt and challenge presumptions about its own universality and neutrality.

The use of the particular as a site of resistance is easy to spot in the work of ecclesiologists who have a clear object to resist, be it racism, able-ism or the Magisterium. But this particular-as-site-of-resistance theme does not *just* crop up in ecclesiology where there is a clear-cut situation where one ecclesial perspective is being marginalised. Rather, this use of the particular signals a general trend within ecclesiology, a prevailing sense that the particular is good, and that metanarratives are bad.¹⁹⁶ What metanarratives? One of the features of postmodernity to which we did

¹⁹⁴ See Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption* 15–18. In a similar vein, Andrea Grillo attends to the ‘familial rites’ that take place in bathrooms, bedrooms and dining rooms, arguing that ‘It is the concrete resistance of the family that can rein in a liturgical rhetoric capable of, for example, constructing the strange legal fiction of a “personal parish”.’ See Andrea Grillo, ‘Ecclesial Rites and Familial Rites: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives of Relationships,’ (Paper presented at the Households of God and Domestic Households: Revisiting the Domestic Church Conference, Leuven, 2009) 2.

¹⁹⁵ Haight, *Christian Community Vol.1* 27–35.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Metanarrative’ is, of course, a slippery term to use, not least because it is a general theory about the way human beings understand and deal with reality, which evolved as a way of critiquing one *particular* such way – the white, western, male way. This means that, like ‘foundationalism’, ‘metanarratives’ are most often discussed by theologians in order to deny, reject, modify or re-understand them. (For comments on foundationalism see Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* 80). Here I am using the term to designate an all-encompassing way of understanding the world. Paul Lakeland provides a good caricature: ‘Possessed of a metanarrative, any one at all, everything is accounted for in a supreme exercise of the comprehension of reality, a tour de force of imagination and a textbook

not draw attention in chapter one is the extent to which *doctrine* appears as problematic metanarrative in postmodernity. The difficulty is not so much that doctrine makes claims about the way the world works, and the way reality is – for example, that human beings are created and will face the judgement of Christ. The difficulty is that the universal claims made by Christian doctrine belie its very particular and human roots – what Foucault calls the ‘hazardous career that Truth has followed’.¹⁹⁷ In short, the difficulty is that postmodern critiques suggest that the gospel proclaimed by theologians is the gospel according to the white, male and privileged, and that Christian doctrine is implicated in the historic (and current) hegemony of this group.¹⁹⁸ Unable to undo that problematic history, and still to an extent bound up in it, theologians turn to precisely the kind of tactics we are witnessing: turning to subjects previously excluded or marginalised, using their particular experience to ‘jam the theoretical machinery’, and thereby undermining ecclesial or theological claims to universality and neutrality.

3. *Some difficulties*

We began this chapter by looking at the reasons concrete ecclesiologists give for their turn to social science, and noting some of the features of concrete ecclesiological language in this connection. We then went *behind* concrete ecclesiologies’ self expressions, to ask how their turn to social science might be implicitly responding to postmodernity, by seeking ways of encounter and sites of resistance. We now need

exercise of power in which the Other is only perceived in and through the metanarrative.’ See Paul Lakeland, *Postmodernity* 32.

¹⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘Questions on Geography’ in Colin Gordon, ed. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–77* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980) 63–77 (66).

¹⁹⁸ Espín, for example, writes of how ‘evangelisation on the Trinity in and from the West has apparently been held hostage to European linguistic and cultural thought patterns.’ See Espín, *Faith of the People* 33.

to draw out some of the problems that arise from the interplay of the various different desires, ways of talking, moves and influences that we have uncovered so far. We will look first at the difficulties caused by the way concrete ecclesiologists often express their ecclesiological task – as the balancing of two kinds of language, theological and social scientific, about the single reality of the church. I will suggest that this results in a problematic view of the nature of ethnography, and a problematic view of the nature of theology. We will then go on to look at some more specifically ecclesiological difficulties.

a) A balancing act

Earlier in the chapter, we noted concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to think about the task of ecclesiology in Christological terms. As in talking about Christ theologians must balance their language in such a way as to show how the divine reality is present in and through the human reality, so concrete ecclesiologists need to balance language about the church to show how the church of faith – one, holy, apostolic and so on – is present in the church of experience. Concrete ecclesiologies' task is to balance two languages in relation to one reality, showing how one is present in and through the other. We have also seen how the concrete ecclesiological project tends to be expressed in opposition to modern ecclesiology. Concrete ecclesiologies are concrete rather than abstract, particular rather than general, focus on the real church rather than the ideal church, and so on. Concrete ecclesiologists turn to social science to help them attend to all these things: the local, the real, the concrete, the particular. Social science is being used to present the *human* reality of the church, and draw attention to how the church of faith is present in experience.

In the chapter so far, we have seen that concrete ecclesiologists use qualitative social science in two ways. On one hand, it is being used to say, ‘No, it’s not like that.’ This means social science is being used to critique and balance out idealist, abstract theological language, which is seen as having only limited purchase on the church’s concrete life. Social science is also used to puncture over-confident claims for the church’s practices and social distinctiveness. So faced with a statement like, ‘The church does not sin, only its members do’, concrete ecclesiologies use social science to draw attention to the *experiential* significance of sin and therefore (at least in a concrete ecclesiological scheme) its theological significance. Faced with a statement like, ‘The church is a colony of resident aliens’, concrete ecclesiologies use social science to point out that the church often does not look much like an alien colony at all. So social science is being used to critique ecclesiology, to say, ‘No, it’s not like that.’ But on the other hand, as well as this critical project, concrete ecclesiologies also want to use qualitative social science constructively to say, ‘In fact, it’s like this.’ They want to use social science to *ground* theological reflection in an accurate picture of what the church is really like.¹⁹⁹ This does not necessarily mean a correlative method, but it does mean (as Healy puts it) that ethnography is being used to *support and guide* a chastening of the church’s self-understanding.²⁰⁰ This is because, as Healy explains, ethnography enables us to look at church communities in a way relatively unburdened by theoretical presuppositions.²⁰¹ By using ethnography, we can even set aside presuppositions about what a religious community is, and gain a picture of the real church that enables us to say ‘It’s not like that; in fact, it’s like this.’ The

¹⁹⁹ So, for example, Martyn Percy grounds his theological and practical reflections on baptism, confirmation and eucharist in sociological accounts of the state of these practices in English culture. See Martyn Percy, *Shaping the Church: The Promise of Implicit Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010): baptism 17–33, confirmation 35–48 and eucharist 49–63.

²⁰⁰ Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 1.

²⁰¹ Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 3.

suggestion is that reflecting theologically on that picture enables concrete ecclesiologists to produce better, more concrete and more helpful ecclesiology.

b) Oppositional pairs

So far, this sounds very common sense and promising. I want to suggest, however, that this idea of balancing two languages about one reality, in combination with concrete ecclesiologies' oppositional self-definition, causes significant theological and ethnographic difficulties. What is the difficulty here? The problem is that the oppositional pairs concrete ecclesiologies often use to express their methodological project tend to become associated with one another, such that good ecclesiology is particular, concrete and real, and bad ecclesiology is general, overly doctrinal and abstract. We have also seen that use of social science is associated with the first group of pairs, the good kind of ecclesiology: concrete ecclesiologies' use of social science is bound up in a turn to the local, particular and experiential.²⁰² I noted in chapter one that these oppositional pairs were being used in a fairly impassioned and rhetorical way.²⁰³ Yet, despite the fact that these oppositional pairs are only being used rhetorically, oppositional thinking nevertheless ends up structuring the relationship between theology and social science. How?

²⁰² In her 'Text and Practices', Clare Watkins notes a similar phenomenon in practical theology. Practical theology's emergence in the intellectual/rational-oriented milieu of late Western modernity (164–5) has meant that it often expresses its task as one of bringing together (correlating) dichotomies (166–7). Watkins suggests that practical theology trades, among others, on the following dichotomies (167):

theory	practice
general principle	situational reality
reality	ideality
theology	other disciplines (167)

Watkins argues that the use of these dichotomies undermines practical theology's theological maturity (163). Concrete ecclesiologies' self-expression in terms of oppositional pairs has the same effect of impeding its growth to theological maturity.

²⁰³ Roger Haight takes care to point out that his 'ecclesiology from below' and 'ecclesiology from above' are just illustrative models. See *Christian Community Vol. I* 31.

The key is in the idea that both languages, theological and social scientific, address *one reality* and that, within that balancing act, ethnography is being used to *chasten* the church's doctrinal self-understanding. This raises some interesting questions about the implied characteristics of ethnography and theology within the concrete ecclesiological scheme. Putting it simply, the idea that ethnography can 'chasten' the church's doctrinal understanding rests on an implied understanding of theology as idealising, generalising and abstract, and an implied understanding of ethnography as realistic, concrete and particular.²⁰⁴ Both languages are being used to describe a single reality. Theology on its own has a tendency towards abstraction, idealisation and the general: social science is used to cool down theological rhetoric about the church when it is becoming overheated. The implied relationship between theology and social science could be described as *thermostatic*.²⁰⁵ The major difficulty underlying the concrete ecclesiological project is this: when concrete ecclesiologies' Christological understanding of their task meets their tendency to define themselves in opposition to modern ecclesiologies, *theology and ethnography become implicitly defined by the way in which they act as functional opposites in ecclesiology*.

²⁰⁴ Van der Ven notes this problem and attempts to break down the opposition between theology and social science. See van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* 101.

²⁰⁵ Healy's 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' provides a good example of this thermostatic relationship between theology and social science in ecclesiology. He argues that theology and social science should *both* be normative for ecclesiology (123). Theology must ground empirical study (125), because 'Unless doctrine contributes from the very beginning of the enterprise, and does so in a way that critically informs and guides the analysis of the situation in some way while at the same time leaving the empirical critical disciplines unimpeded, then it is difficult to see how practical theology can be critical in a *theological* sense – as an exercise in theology.' (122–3). Having established a doctrinal basis, theologians can then turn to empirical study: 'The kind of enquiry useful for practical ecclesiology is thus one that simply gives an account of what is going on in a congregation, using the members' own language(s), with minimal theorizing and generalization, and maximum attention to detail and complexity.' (126, see also 125). Healy then suggests that the function of practical ecclesiology is to 'negotiate, as it were, a more adequate understanding of the Church that is then tested by experimentation in church life, where further negotiations will occur concretely, to become known through subsequent empirical accounts and be brought into critical engagement with doctrines once again, and so on.' Practical ecclesiology is an ongoing process, where theology and ethnography are opposing forces that mutually regulate one another – very like a thermostat in a central heating system.

Looking at an example of this at work will help. Recall Healy's critique of Haight's work that I noted earlier. The complaint there was that his use of social science was too *generalising* and that unseating doctrine simply meant prioritising some other large-scale account of human existence. Healy maintained in response that doctrine *ought* to ground social scientific study and that social scientific engagement ought to be very local.²⁰⁶ This, Healy acknowledges, introduces a necessary tension into ecclesiology with regard to how it relates the concrete to the general, and how it progresses from empirical description to theological reflection. This tension is simply inherent in the task of concrete ecclesiology. The danger here – and I think a slight tendency in this regard is evident both in Haight's method and Healy's critique – is that the bipartite divisions of modern ecclesiology silently map themselves onto the new empirical approach. To caricature modern ecclesiology, it looks for Church (with a capital C), behind, under or beyond the local and particular church.²⁰⁷ This manifests itself in a preference for talking about doctrine and the church's essential nature, and talking about the universal church. Concrete ecclesiologies, or ecclesiologies from below, seek church *in* the local and particular. Yet the 'necessary tension' Healy describes results from *continuing to locate doctrinal reflection on the level of the general, universal and abstract*. There is a sense here that the more doctrinal our reflections become, the further away we get from the concrete, which by implication is the local and particular.

²⁰⁶ Healy, 'An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?' 2–3, 5.

²⁰⁷ Healy argues that modern ecclesiologies have a tendency to think of the church as having a twofold ontological structure: 'One of its aspects, the primary one, is spiritual and invisible, often described as the church's "true nature" or its "essence." The other aspect is the everyday, empirical reality of the church, its institutions and activities. The relation between the two aspects is often described by saying that the primary one "realizes" or "manifests" itself in the subsequent one, or that the visible church is the "expression" of its invisible aspect.' See *Church, World and the Christian Life* 28.

This tendency to view theology and ethnography as functional opposites creates significant difficulties. The two most fundamental problems are the resulting pictures of ethnography and theology. Seeing ethnography as the ‘real’ opposite to theology’s ‘ideal’ risks leaving us with a problematically simplistic view of the way ethnography works, and the kind of ‘real’ it can give ecclesiology.²⁰⁸ Simultaneously, seeing theology as the ‘ideal’ opposite to ethnography’s real fails to *undo* the problems of modern ecclesiologies, in favour of simply ‘balancing’ or disrupting them with ethnography. I will argue in the chapters that follow that continuing to think of the task of concrete ecclesiology as balancing the descriptive claims of two functionally opposite languages leaves us with an impoverished understanding of ethnography, an impoverished understanding of theology, and only a Procrustean way of putting the two disciplines together. But I am running ahead of myself. We need to look first at how the view of ethnography and theology as functional opposites causes a range of difficulties in concrete ecclesiologies. I will begin by showing how concrete ecclesiologists underestimate the complexity of ethnography’s relationship to the real, and fail to take account of the degree to which the theologian’s subjectivity is involved in using social science. We will address this in much greater depth in the following chapter, but it will become evident here that closer attention to ethnography complicates concrete ecclesiologies’ turn to it for an account of the ‘real church’.

c) A closer look at ethnography

We saw earlier on that Healy advocated the use of ethnography because it enabled ecclesiologists to ‘watch’ the church with minimal theoretical and theological

²⁰⁸ Martyn Percy writes, ‘Sociology is an attempt at social realism; religion though, is about idealism.’ See Percy, *Shaping the Church* 35.

commitments.²⁰⁹ Ethnography, it seems, offers theologians a picture of the ‘real’ church, which they can then use critically, to disrupt bad ecclesiology, or constructively, to create truly concrete ecclesiology. I want to show briefly here, before our more in-depth exploration in the next chapter, how the implicit understanding of ethnography and theology as functional opposites leads theologians to drastically underestimate the complexity of ethnography, and in particular the involvement of the ethnographer’s subjectivity in the production of ethnographic knowledge. Moreover, the way ethnography is deployed by ecclesiologists tends to downplay the degree to which theological judgements and predilections are involved at every step of the way. We will look first at some of the ways in which closer attention to ethnography complicates and qualifies theologians’ straightforward use of it to say ‘It’s not like that’ and ‘In fact, it’s like this.’

The ethnographer’s subjectivity is unavoidably tied up in the social reality she describes. First of all, ethnography is not straightforward ‘watching’ of a social group from the outside, but observation from the inside. Ethnographers can only gain knowledge of other people’s everyday lives by participating in them – and that means participating from a particular place, or a particular social role offered by the community.²¹⁰ Second, in this process of participative understanding, the

²⁰⁹ Healy writes, ‘...it is also necessary for those engaged in practical ecclesiology to have on hand good empirical accounts of particular congregations, for it is in these that the full complexity of the Church’s concrete experience comes to light. These accounts should, of course, be developed by those with the appropriate training, who will often be non-theologians. This is a good thing since, as far as possible, no theological presuppositions or doctrines should be permitted to inform the empirical analysis, either by suggesting things to look for, or setting out some kind of heuristic structure or agenda. That would be to bypass the local experience too quickly and undermine the critical and concrete nature of the enquiry.’ See ‘Ecclesiology and Practical Theology’ 125.

²¹⁰ Jenkins writes, ‘...the anthropologist must give up the ideal of objective knowledge, in the sense of an understanding that everybody might share. To understand is to acknowledge one’s own participation, and therefore to be changed since, in order to participate, one of the roles on offer has to be taken up and explored.’ Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 443. He adds, ‘Knowledge of everyday life is not

ethnographer can only understand what she does not know in terms of what she does. In this connection, James Clifford draws attention to the *allegorical* nature of ethnography. When drawing attention to how another culture does a certain thing differently, the ethnographer depends on what Clifford calls an 'abstract plane of similarity'.²¹¹ So, to understand what is different about !Kung childbirth practices, for example, I must have an underlying understanding that childbirth is a common human experience. This then allows me to point out ways in which this sameness is done differently: as Clifford puts it, a difference is posited, and simultaneously transcended.²¹² The ethnographer's understanding of the other unavoidably goes hand in hand with her understanding of herself.²¹³ As Kirsten Hastrup puts it, 'the relation between the 'knower' and the 'object' of necessity bends back into the perception of the object itself and is cemented in writing.'²¹⁴ The third thing we need to note is that this complicates simple appeals to 'the facts' of a situation. In the field, the anthropologist is engaged in a far from value-free process of selecting which facts are pertinent to her inquiry. Identifying facts means the anthropologist is already reading the phenomena concerned in a certain way. Hastrup argues that '...it seems impossible to even speak of 'stubborn facts' without implying a particular scheme of understanding to which they do not lend themselves as evidence.'²¹⁵ The ethnographer's (or theologian's) subjectivity, her vested interests, are inevitably involved in the process of saying, 'In fact, it's like this.'

available to the disinterested gaze of an inquirer; rather, fieldwork is an apprenticeship of signs, a process of entry into a particular world' (445).

²¹¹ James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) 98–121 (101).

²¹² Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', 99.

²¹³ Astley recognises this in connection with the descriptive task in the study of theology: describing another's theological viewpoint is inevitably done by understanding it in relation to my own. See Astley, *Ordinary Theology* 109–10.

²¹⁴ Kirsten Hastrup, 'Getting it Right: Knowledge and Evidence in Anthropology,' *Current Anthropology* 4:4 (2004): 455–72 (456).

²¹⁵ Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 459.

One last characteristic of ethnographic writing should be noted before we move on. As well as drawing attention to the allegorical character of ethnographic understanding in the field, Clifford also notes the allegorical nature of ethnographic texts themselves. Ethnographic texts do not just tell one story, about the subject under investigation. They are also invariably caught up in extraneous moral and ideological narratives.²¹⁶ Margaret Mead's famous work on Samoa, for example, is not just an investigation of adolescence in the South Seas: it also speaks to the nature-nurture debates surrounding cultural determinism that were raging at the time, and the deep post-war need to see human nature as essentially malleable.²¹⁷ So ethnographic texts are not simply a flat reproduction of a living culture into a text. They are *three-dimensional*, depending for their meaning on interaction between the world of the ethnographer and the world of the reader, and acting with moral and ideological force in those worlds. Because ethnography is allegorical in this way, appealing to the 'real' in a way that equates the anthropological task with a laboratory experiment does not do justice to the literary complexity involved.²¹⁸ In a laboratory experiment, we have some way of specifying how it is that our metaphors – the 'shells' of electrons circling the nucleus of an atom, for example – fall short of explaining the reality we want to describe. With ethnographic description, the task is much more complicated. The allegorical character of ethnography means that we discover and create the other at the same time. Ethnographic work is not just baldly representative or descriptive, but *creative*. Because ethnographic representation is a matter of creation as well as

²¹⁶ James Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Allegory', 98. Clifford Geertz draws attention to the way Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Tristes Tropiques* functions on four allegorical levels (which he describes as five thin books 'wildly signalling to get out inside this fat one') in his *Works and Lives* 33–44 (33).

²¹⁷ James Clifford briefly points this out in 'On Ethnographic Allegory' 102–3. For further reading, see Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). See also Margaret Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa: A Study of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies* (London: Penguin, 1928).

²¹⁸ To say nothing of the philosophical complexity involved in scientific experiments and the process of challenging scientific paradigms. See Kirsten Hastrup's comments on ethnography and the spurious distinction between 'hard science' and 'soft science' in Kirsten Hastrup, 'Hunger and the Hardness of Facts,' *Man (New Series)* 28:4 (1993): 727–39.

description, and because we have no access to reality uninfluenced by our own particular place in that reality, we have only limited means to specify how it is that our descriptions fall short of reality.

If we think back over the ecclesiologies we have explored in this chapter with Clifford's points in mind, we can see without much difficulty that concrete ecclesiologies are very much involved in telling doctrinal and disciplinary stories at the same time as appealing ethnographically to the 'real church'. Roger Haight's social-scientific survey of church history is, on one level, an attempt to tell church history like it was. It is also a story told to undermine and argue against certain understandings of ecclesial origins, institution and authority. Likewise, Isasi-Díaz is using ethnography to attend to the experience and voices of Latinas, but she is also thereby telling a story about the ecclesial and academic exclusion of such voices, and their need for liberation. Mary McClintock Fulkerson's use of ethnography tells a story about experiences of race and disability in Good Samaritan Methodist Church, but also speaks to larger stories about the priorities and methods of academic theology, the voices and experiences it tends to exclude, and the living legacy of race history in US churches.

My point here is not that any social science tainted by 'values' is fatally compromised from the outset – far from it. My point is that the way concrete ecclesiologists appeal to ethnography, as the functional opposite of theology, tends to downplay both the complexity of ethnography in itself, and the degree to which theological assumptions are involved in their use of ethnography at every step of the way. If ethnography is implicitly defined as theology's opposing force, then we end up with a caricatured image of ethnography as dealing in description, objectivity, facts, the real: an image

that simply does not stand up to scrutiny. The features of ethnography that we have noted so far complicate somewhat Healy's idea of ethnography as guiding an empirical and doctrinal chastening of ecclesiology. Currently, concrete ecclesiologies lack a sufficiently reflexive awareness of the degree to which their use of ethnography is bound up in their theological outlook and aims. We need a much more sophisticated and detailed understanding of what ethnography can offer us by way of the 'real' church. We also need more reflexivity with regard to how ethnography and ecclesiology interrelate.²¹⁹ The next chapter will undertake much of this work. What we need to do now is look at how a similarly caricatured understanding of theology causes concrete ecclesiologies significant difficulties.

d) The suppression of the doctrinal register

Looking back, we saw that concrete ecclesiologies' problem with modern ecclesiology was that it was too preoccupied with models and metaphors – too interested in whether 'community of the faithful' or 'body of Christ' was a better description of the church's nature, and not interested enough in the nitty-gritty reality of the church's concrete existence. Language about the church's ideal nature, it seems, lacks purchase on the day-to-day reality of ecclesial existence. Concrete ecclesiologies pick up social science as a way of getting at that day-to-day concrete reality, and using it to critique and balance out idealistic theological talk about the church. Again, this sounds fairly straightforward - what is the difficulty here?

²¹⁹ Van der Ven comes close to this, by arguing against 'the sharp contrast between the observer's and the participant's perspective, the hard and soft method, and the objective and subjective approach'. He argues that theology and social science are complementary in ecclesiology because 'in explaining reality objectively, one automatically comes across aspects that should be considered for subjective understanding; and in understanding something subjectively, one automatically comes across aspects that should be considered for objective explanation. This implicative relation rests on the fact that the two poles attract each other: the object and the subject of study.' See van der Ven, *Ecclesiology in Context* 103–4. Although van der Ven's approach is promising, he still contrasts the functions of theology and social science more strongly than I will argue we should.

We have already noted one difficulty - the way in which concrete ecclesiologists tend to see theology and ethnography as having opposite functions in ecclesiology means that they tend not to be very aware of the ways in which their use of ethnography is already functioning on a number of allegorical levels. Ecclesiological use of ethnography does not just tell 'small' stories about particular communities of faith; it also tells 'big' stories about the kind of thing that the church is, and therefore the kinds of ways that theologians should be engaging with it. Yet, though present, these substantively theological arguments tend not to appear *explicitly* in concrete ecclesiologies. What we see instead is straightforward, pragmatic appeals to the way the church *is*. So, for example, even though Roger Haight disagrees with magisterial ecclesiology on a theological level, we see his theological disagreement expressed in terms of an alternative telling of church history – a different historical and social-scientific account of how the church is. We have also seen ecclesiologists using ethnography to present stubborn facts about the way that the church *is* in reality: that its practices are badly performed, or misunderstood, for example. As Hastrup points out, such stubborn facts are only stubborn in a scheme that does not explain them.²²⁰ Yet, again, the ecclesiologies against which such stubborn facts are being deployed are not often explicitly argued against in the text *on a theological level*.

The problem here is not that social science is being used to puncture theological and ethnographic claims. The problem is that the theological dimension of ecclesiological arguments tends to get repressed.²²¹ We will have a look at some of the problems this causes, and then ask *why* it is that the theological dimension of ecclesiological

²²⁰ Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 459.

²²¹ Healy recognises that failing to explicitly ground empirical studies in doctrine simply means that doctrinal agenda operate below the surface. See 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' 123.

arguments gets repressed in this way. The ‘parent’ difficulty here is that concrete ecclesiologies are saying one thing and doing another. What we see concrete ecclesiologies saying is that modern ecclesiologies’ abstract, doctrinal, metaphorical language floats free of reality – it does not address the actual reality of the church. What we see concrete ecclesiologies *doing* suggests the opposite problem. That is, we see them using ethnography to call into question models and metanarratives that *do* have power despite their lack of fit, the concrete effects of which are precisely what concrete ecclesiologies are contesting. Haight is not just using social science to argue against ecclesiology from above: he is using social science to argue against the *church* from above.²²²

This parent difficulty has a number of problem children. Theological or doctrinal perspectives, as we have seen, end up being associated with metaphorical language, abstract speculation and general or universal-level talk about the church; ethnography is about the particular, the real, and so on.²²³ We have already seen that this results in a picture of ethnography that is insufficiently aware of the way in which the ethnographer’s (or theologian’s) subjectivity is involved in the account of social reality that he produces. An associated problem is that ethnography is sometimes seen as flatly *descriptive*. We will pursue this in more detail in the next chapter, but the basic problem here is this: ethnography’s task is regarded as the description or representation of an irreducibly complex external reality. The less ‘smoothing over’ and generalising ethnography does in order to produce its picture of a given social

²²² Gerard Mannion has a good appreciation of this, and discusses Haight’s work in the context of what he calls a growing climate of ‘neo-exclusivism’ in the Roman Catholic church. See Mannion, *Ecclesiology in Postmodernity* 32–7.

²²³ Or, as Nick Adams and Tim Jenkins put it, ethnography deals in parts, and theology deals in wholes. See Nicholas Adams, and Timothy Jenkins, ‘Parts and Wholes’ (Paper presented at the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network Conference, Aberdeen, March 2010).

reality, the better.²²⁴ Ethnography's natural entropy is what makes it a good counterbalance to theology's tendency to generalise. Because ethnography is implicitly understood as the functional opposite of theology in this way, concrete ecclesiologists tend to downplay the *explanatory* role of social science. Ethnography is not just about 'horizontal' description or people's experience, as Kirsten Hastrup puts it, but 'vertical' explanations as to the way that experience is formed and organised.²²⁵ Concrete ecclesiologists' picture of ethnography also does not take adequate account of the degree to which ethnography deals in metaphors.²²⁶ Metaphorical language is identity-forming, and therefore historical: 'metaphors are not conceptual puzzles external to social life; they intervene, shape and produce action.'²²⁷

This is a very summary treatment of a complex topic that will have more attention in the next chapter. The important point here is that concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to suppress the substantive theological aspects of their arguments, in favour of appeals to flatly descriptive accounts of the 'real church', makes ethnography bear too much theological weight. It is not that ethnography cannot and does not do theological work – we have already seen that it can and does, whether or not ecclesiologists are aware of it. My suggestion here is that concrete ecclesiologies' unwillingness to tackle theological disagreements *on a theological level* makes ethnography do work that it

²²⁴ Healy, 'An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?' 2.

²²⁵ For the difference between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' generalisations, see Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 458.

²²⁶ Clifford Geertz writes, 'The strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that its very nature demands we talk about it without fuss – a spade is a spade, a rose a rose – on pain of illusion, trumpery and self-bewitchment, leads onto the even stranger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact.' Geertz, *Works and Lives* 140.

²²⁷ Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology* 37. To give an example, Nancy Scheper-Hughes documents the rumour among native Andean Indians that the UN food programme was designed to fatten up Andean babies so that the US Air Force could steal them, and use their bodies to grease their jet engines. Scheper-Hughes notes that such myths are metaphorical, speaking to 'symbolic' rather than 'actual' truths – the metaphorical idea is of the US as an all-consuming invading power. Nevertheless, the metaphor formed history: the Andean Indians refused the food aid provided by the UN, and many starved as a result. See Nancy Scheper-Hughes, *Death Without Weeping: The Everyday Violence of Life in Brazil* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 236–7.

should not be made to do. The danger is that, in using ethnography as a way of correcting theology's tendency to generalise, concrete ecclesiologists make it do too much theological work, such that they risk ending up – as Vincent Crapanzano puts it – sacrificing complex and contested events, lives and experiences to their rhetorical function in a literary (or in this case theological) discourse.²²⁸

A satisfactory understanding of ethnography is not the only casualty of concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to treat theology and ethnography as functionally opposite. The resulting understanding of theology itself also ends up constraining the promise of concrete ecclesiologies. At the same time as concrete ecclesiologies acknowledge the ways in which theological perspectives can be too abstract, idealistic and general, they fail to challenge theology's association with these characteristics. Within a concrete ecclesiological scheme, theology is simply assumed to be naturally abstracting, generalising and so on – it is simply a tension theologians have to live with, Healy suggests. Concrete ecclesiologies' newly gained awareness of the ways in which doctrine can function, and historically has functioned, as a problematic metanarrative, is a gain not to be squandered. Concrete ecclesiologists are right that we need to find ways of using doctrinal perspectives, and simultaneously acknowledging their particular historical provenance and outlook. But the tension Healy is describing, whereby theological perspectives are seen as always pulling away and abstracting from concrete complexity, and ethnography is always pulling in the opposite direction, is not a fruitful tension: it is a Procrustean one.

e) Distinctiveness and 'lowest common denominator' ecclesiology

²²⁸ Vincent Crapanzano, 'Hermes' Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description,' in ed. Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture* 51–76 (76).

This brings us to the final set of difficulties with concrete ecclesiologies. Here, I want to explore the ways in which the characteristics we have explored so far can work together to produce a problematic preoccupation with the church's distinctiveness, which results in what I will call 'lowest common denominator' ecclesiology. In order to explain this we will look in more depth at one of the most promising pieces of concrete ecclesiological reflection produced thus far: Healy's 'A (Somewhat) Chastened Ecclesiology'.²²⁹ Drawing out the difficulties with this piece will give us a clearer idea of the constructive work needed in the chapters that follow.

i) A (somewhat) chastened ecclesiology

Healy's paper has two aims. The first is to challenge theologies that begin with the church, either using a cultural linguistic approach or a correlative method, by challenging the degree to which the church can be distinguished as a distinctive and coherent community. The second, as we have already noted, is to suggest that ethnographic descriptions of church might have a direct bearing on systematic theology (1). After suggesting that ethnography allows us to watch the church without theological or institutional assumptions about what churches are (3), Healy notes three points from empirical studies that complicate methods that begin with the church. Empirical studies show, first, that congregations differ extensively in their life and language, and therefore in how they understand God (3–4). Second, empirical studies show that congregations exhibit a great deal of internal pluralism: describing congregational 'identity' cannot be done without a degree of distortion and editing (4). Third, empirical studies suggest that congregations cannot be adequately

²²⁹ For simplicity, references to Healy's typescript will be given in brackets within the text.

described without setting them in context: 'the congregation itself is also as it were a Christian expression of the town or region in which it is located, rather than something separate built on another foundation.' (4)

Healy moves on to argue that such empirical studies complicate the methodological turn to the church, whether that turn is to a particular congregation or, even more so, the worldwide church. Though we may be able to find shared characteristics across all churches – the use of scripture, for example – these shared characteristics are only formal, and too general to be useful (5). He writes,

Although these elements are present in virtually all congregations, the ethnographic view undermines the notion that they constitute the church as a 'community' or a moral person in a sufficiently rich and consistent way to work as a principle for theological or ecclesiological method...Indeed, the worldwide church – the church that is often the subject both of contemporary ecclesiology and of modern theological method – when considered with a focus on detail, particularity and the exceptional, is arguably little more than a congeries of diverse forms of life, languages and meanings of the word 'God'. (5)

The implications for both cultural-linguistic and correlative method are clear (5): we cannot start with the church as it exists (6). The question then arises as to whether, if ethnography cannot *give* theologians the church as an empirically distinctive community, theology ought to place so much emphasis on the church as being an empirically distinctive community. 'If the church's empirical distinctiveness is limited', Healy argues, 'its practices and beliefs largely determined by the resources of the world's cultures and societies, it is the church's theological distinctiveness that is of primary significance.' (12)

From here, Healy begins to explore an alternative way of thinking about the church's distinctiveness as lying in its *mediating* function (8). By 'mediating', Healy means the basic claim that the church brings its members into a closer relationship with God

than would otherwise be the case. The basic argument here is that, if ethnography cannot give us a 'distinctive Christian tradition' in a strong sense, we should not base our theology on it. If ethnography shows us both the great plurality of beliefs and practices at the level of congregational life, and the degree to which those beliefs and practices are a product of the congregations' cultural surroundings, then we would do well to build on these features in our theological scheme, rather than try to ignore them or brush them aside. Healy draws attention to the way in which ordinary Christians 'pick and choose' doctrines, beliefs and practices, both from official teaching, and from the lives of their congregations (10). While this kind of practice is sometimes regarded as defective by theologians, Healy suggests we might look at it another way, and quotes Charles Taylor's words, 'one has to see what is great in the culture of modernity, as well as what is shallow or dangerous' (11). The suggestion here is that we see the church's mediating function, the distinctive way in which it brings people closer to God, as being constituted by the ongoing efforts of its members to 'live authentically' as Christians within the world, using both the resources of church tradition, and the resources of the world (12).

So, attention to ethnography might lead theologians to place less theological weight on community, and more theological weight on individuals. However, Healy is not simply shifting the theological weight from communal distinctiveness to individual distinctiveness. The church's *theological distinctiveness* is of primary significance, and Healy is clear that the church is theologically distinctive because of God's call, not its response to that call:

Scripture indicates its members are called to be the church, to respond to the Gospel, the truth about the world. They do so haltingly and feebly for the most part, and that's alright, because God's salvation of the world is not contingent upon the church embodying or displaying the Gospel successfully. Nor does the church possess the Gospel. Rather, through the

power of the Holy Spirit, the church is to point away from itself to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is as a personal instrument of God, as it were, that it is theologically distinctive: here, if anywhere, we can talk about a moral Person with a truly individual life. But this person and life is not empirically visible or even empirically actual; the church cannot display its special relation to God in, say, a shared set of distinctive practices or beliefs, or in some depth dimension of its essence. (12–13)

What emerges is an understanding of the church as ‘but the worldly expression of the Christian response to God’s saving work in the world.’ (13) Healy concludes,

We are hidden, yet truly called by God, and we are the church irrespective of the quality of our response. As the church, then, our true centre, our essential existence, lies outside ourselves, in God and in the world. As the Christian expression of the world, we remain a worldly product, for to be the church as it is called to be, we must be in and of the world; we are not called to leave the world and anyway, how could we? But we are indeed called, so our lives as Christians are centered in God’s call to us in the world. The world and God constitute the church; the church isn’t the church apart from both the world and God working in it. (13)

Some of Healy’s theological conclusions are attractive, and I will echo some of his themes as I develop my understanding of the church more fully in the chapters that follow. What I want to pick up on is his emphasis on the church’s distinctiveness.

ii) Distinctiveness and the lowest common denominator

I have already pointed out above that concrete ecclesiologies rely on an implicit analogy between the church and an individual embodied agent. In Healy’s work, the analogy becomes more explicit. He quotes Schleiermacher’s understanding of the church as a body of people that, as a moral person, has a genuinely individual life (1). The church is analogous to the individual moral agent. The assumption that follows, in his critique of claims for the church’s distinctiveness, is that if the church is to be an individual – *one thing* – then it must be recognisably such, it must actually empirically *look* like one thing. When we ask whether the church is distinctive, we are asking whether it has an empirical and *substantial* (not merely formal) consistency

of belief and practice. We are asking whether the entire church exhibits the same self-consistency of belief and action that could be expected of an (implicitly virtuous) individual. The underlying analogy, and the assumption that if something is really distinctive it is perceptibly so, sets us looking for obvious commonalities of belief and practice.

These underlying assumptions tend to produce a 'lowest common denominator' ecclesiology. For the church to be intelligibly one thing, as a single person is, it must have concrete commonalities. Close attention to the plurality of churches' belief and practice frustrates the search for substantive commonalities. The only commonality ethnography can give us, it seems, is individuals – and so Healy builds his theological reflection on the lowest common denominator. Discussing the possibility of finding significant universals in human nature, Clifford Geertz argues in a similar vein to Healy that any universals found across the breadth of human culture and history would be too general to be significant. Geertz also concludes,

even if I am wrong (as, admittedly, many anthropologists would hold) in claiming that the *consensus gentium* approach can produce neither substantial universals nor specific connections between cultural and noncultural phenomena to explain them, the question still remains whether such universals should be taken as the central elements in the definition of man, whether a lowest-common-denominator view of humanity is what we want anyway.²³⁰

This, I think, is the major question for Healy's ecclesiology. The presumed analogy that underlies his work produces the obvious answer to the question of whether the church is a perceptibly distinctive unity: the church is not empirically one person so, no, it is not perceptibly distinctive in the way that an individual moral agent is. The question that remains in our context is whether a theology built on the lowest

²³⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 43.

common denominator ethnography can offer us – individuals – is what we want anyway. I suggest it is not, for good ethnographic and theological reasons.

iii) Ethnographic and theological problems

What are the problems here? The difficulty here occurs when the analogy between the church and an individual moral person meets the assumption that the church of experience is the real church, or the church in actuality. Putting it more simply, the problem arises in the idea that, if the church is distinctive, it should exhibit visible and consistent commonalities in its empirical life. This causes Healy to focus his use of social science (in this paper, at least) on whether it will or will not deliver concrete commonalities. Yet social science is not just about finding distinctive commonalities in experience, and representing collections of individuals. It is also about explaining the *production* of experience, and the persistent relations between individuals.²³¹ Overlooking the causal dimension of social science also leads to a further problem. Critiquing a naturalist view of social science, Bhaskar writes,

The standard hermeneutical fork, generated by the conceptual/perceptible dichotomy of classic empiricist ontology...ignores of course precisely those possibilities opened up by a causal criterion for ascribing reality. Thus both parties to the naturalist dispute have assumed that the social must be either merely empirically real or in effect transcendently ideal, so producing either a conceptually impoverished and deconceptualising empiricism or a hermeneutics drained of causal import and impervious to empirical controls.²³²

What I want to pick up on here is the way in which the premises of Healy's discussion force us into the same position – we must choose whether the distinctiveness of the church is transcendently ideal, or empirically real. On his view of social science, enquiring after the empirical distinctiveness of the church leaves us with the lowest

²³¹ See Roy Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences* (Brighton: Harvester, 1979) 35. The following chapter explores this further.

²³² Bhaskar, *Possibility of Naturalism* 16.

common denominator – individuals. And, as he points out, individual Christians are not terribly distinctive, we cannot put much theological weight on that either. If the church's distinctiveness cannot be empirically real, then it must be transcendently ideal, or, as Healy puts it, 'If the church's empirical distinctiveness is limited, its practices and beliefs largely determined by the resources of the world's cultures and societies, it is the church's theological distinctiveness that is of primary significance.'

(12)

The problem here is that the assumptions of Healy's argument lead us in a circle: what is theologically significant is what the church is in actuality; the church in actuality is not a distinctive community in any simple empirical sense; therefore the distinctiveness of the empirical community of the church cannot be theologically significant. Quite apart from the ethnographic difficulties we have already noted, there are a number of theological problems here. First, Healy's circular argument simply repeats the error that concrete ecclesiologies attribute to modern ecclesiology. There we saw the reasoning that if the church is not holy or one on an empirical level, then the empirical level cannot be theologically significant: the church's oneness and holiness must exist only on a theological level. This produces ecclesiologies that see the church's theological significance as somewhere other than its concrete life. Healy's reasoning here tends towards the same problem.

Second, even as Healy seeks to downplay the significance of the church's distinctiveness, the distinctiveness of the church is in fact what ends up controlling the theological discussion.²³³ This, again, throws us back into the problem of lowest-

²³³ The brief doctrinal basis for empirical study that Healy provides in 'Ecclesiology and Practical Theology' also focuses quite heavily on the church's distinctiveness. The church is distinctive because the Holy Spirit works in it, making it possible to *be* the church. 'Although the Church is a human

common-denominator ecclesiology, because all the theological weight falls on what makes the church distinctive. Because what distinguishes does not wholly constitute, a rather thin account of ecclesiality results. An analogy will help explain my point here: if someone was to give an account of me in terms of my *distinctiveness* from my three sisters, they would not have a full account of me as a person, because the attributes that distinguish me from my sisters (dark hair, ability to play the guitar) are neither the *only* things that make me who I am, nor likely the most important things. Moreover, Jesus' first words in Mark's Gospel are not, 'The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near; be distinctive, and believe in the good news.' Rather, the call is to repent – to change, to convert and to follow (Mk 1:15). For sure, an emphasis on Jesus' followers' separateness from the world emerges in John's gospel and the Pauline letters. Yet separateness from the world, and the world's hostility, is the result and not the cause of Christian distinctiveness. That is, distinctiveness follows on change – and I suggest Healy's account of the church, while promising, is still too determined by the first and too little by the second.

The final theological problem we need to note is the way in which forcing a choice between an empirically real or transcendently ideal account of the church's distinctiveness leaves us, as Sebastian Moore puts it, 'making Christ the answer without doing the homework'.²³⁴ What I want to suggest here is that Healy's focus on the church's theological distinctiveness ends up making the inevitable failure of humans to

institution, it is different from any other group of people in this regard.' (123). The Holy Spirit works in other groups, he adds, and perhaps all groups, but it does not bring them together as church (124). The church has a distinctive relation to God, although other groups may have their own distinctive relation to God too (124). The church's members are called by the gift of faith to love and serve Jesus Christ; they therefore also have a distinctive relation to Jesus Christ through grace. He adds: '(To some degree this is also empirically evident: no other group tries to follow Jesus Christ.)' (His parentheses, 124.) Healy's emphasis on distinctiveness can also be found in his definition of the concrete church in Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 4–5.

²³⁴ Dom Sebastian Moore, 'Four Steps Towards Making Sense of Theology,' *Downside Review* 382 (1993): 79–100 (100).

live lives changed by the gospel undermine the force of the gospel challenge to do so. Christians respond to the call of scripture ‘haltingly and feebly for the most part, and that’s alright, because God’s salvation of the world is not contingent upon the church embodying or displaying the Gospel successfully.’ (12) My difficulty here is not with the idea that God’s salvation is not contingent on the church’s performance because, thank God, it is not: my difficulty is with the alacrity with which, in Healy’s scheme, our failure to live changed lives undercuts the theological significance of our struggle to do so. For sure, the Christian life does involve ambiguity, confusion and mistakes. Above all it involves the failure over and over again to reflect in our own mean lives and loves the fullness of life and love that God offers us, and longs for us to participate in. Yet in the face of such failure, to simply say ‘and that’s alright’ not only fails to do justice to the concrete character of our struggle to live differently: it also fails to do justice to the costly character of the struggle by which God’s victory is won. In short, Healy fails to do justice to the incarnate character of our struggle and our salvation. Kathryn Tanner writes,

Of course we are likely to fail in our efforts to realize a community of mutual fulfilment: what effort for the good – whatever its goal – isn’t likely to fail in a world as wracked by sin as ours is? That is not to say, however, that God hasn’t created a world of finite persons with this sort of end for us in mind and, in the incarnation, found a way beyond the fact of both our sin and finitude to give it to us. If we are called to be ministers of that divine mission through such gifts, let us not use the excuse of sin and finitude to lessen the challenge.²³⁵

4. *Summary*

We have come a long way from our starting point at the beginning of the chapter, and it will be helpful to summarise the ground gained before outlining the constructive work needed in the chapters to come. This chapter has pursued one aspect of concrete

²³⁵ Tanner, ‘Church and Action’ 232.

ecclesiologies' common sense: their use of social science. At the beginning of the chapter, we looked at what concrete ecclesiologists say about their use of social science. We saw social science being used to balance and chasten talk about the church, to attend to particular experience, and to make ecclesiology more practically helpful. We also noted some of the ways in which concrete ecclesiologists talked about the task of ecclesiology by drawing analogies with Christology, and working with an analogy between the church and the embodied individual. From here, we moved on to look at the *function* of social science in ecclesiology, and what moves it was being used to make. Here we saw concrete ecclesiologies using social science to make a turn to the subject, both as a means of encounter and as a site of resistance. Social science is used to foreground particular experience both as a way of grounding theology, and as a way of disrupting theological claims to universality and neutrality. Surveying the variety of ways in which social science is used by ecclesiologists prepared the ground for a critical exploration of the tensions that emerge in concrete ecclesiologies. Here we saw that the tendency for ethnography and theology to be implicitly defined as functional opposites within the ecclesiological scheme left us with considerable difficulties: an underestimation of the complexity of ethnography, and in particular the role of the ethnographer's subjectivity, and the tendency for the doctrinal aspect of ecclesiological debates to be suppressed. We then explored in greater depth how the presuppositions of concrete ecclesiologies work together to produce a preoccupation with the church's distinctiveness, and a tendency toward what I called 'lowest common denominator' ecclesiology.

The analysis of this chapter leaves us with considerable constructive work to undertake in the chapters that follow. The major problem to address is concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to think of theology and ethnography as functional opposites – a problem

that arises, as we have seen, from concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to think of their task as balancing these two languages in relation to a single object. The best way to unpick this tangle of problems will be to turn concrete ecclesiologies' current approach inside out. Instead of asking how both languages, theological and ethnographic, relate to a single object, I suggest that we should focus instead on how ethnography and theology understand and relate to their *own* objects of study. In the next chapter, we will explore in depth how ethnographers have understood their object of study, the social real. This will provide us with a more sophisticated understanding of ethnography, and a clearer picture of the kind of 'real church' it can offer ecclesiology. It will also undermine the idea of theology and ethnography as functional opposites, by enabling us to draw some similarities between the ways in which ethnography and theology relate to their objects of inquiry. The exploration of ethnography in chapter three will prepare the ground for the theological discussion of chapter four. There, I will develop some proposals for thinking about the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection that might enable us to avoid a 'lowest common denominator' approach to ecclesiology, and develop a theologically rich account of the church without focussing on the church's distinctiveness.

Chapter Three: Ethnography and the Social Real

Introduction

Attempts to bring together theological and social scientific perspectives on the church have often been frustrated by the claim that social scientists and theologians have different objects of inquiry. Theologians are apt to tell social scientists that they are only examining the institution, the outward social appearance of the church – with the implication that they are missing what is realest and truest about the church's existence. The social scientific retort to such claims, and to theologians' insistence that they are studying the church of faith, the universal, invisible or ideal church, is to deny that the object of theological inquiry exists at all. Concrete ecclesiologists, as we have seen, are determined that theology and social science are not condemned to talking past one another, each defending its own object of inquiry while denying the validity of the other's claims about it. Concrete ecclesiologies are defined by the conviction that theology and ethnography have one and the same object, that the church of experience is also the church of faith, and that theological and ethnographic perspectives can be integrated to produce an account of the church that is both concrete and theological.

While I share concrete ecclesiologies' conviction that the concrete church is worthy of theological attention, and that ethnography can help us attend to it, I do not share their approach. In the last chapter we saw that even as concrete ecclesiologies attempt to move between the traditional impasse between theology and social science, they become mired in the oppositions generated by that impasse: ideal/real,

concrete/abstract, particular/universal, and so on. It is concrete ecclesiologies' determination that theology and social science can have the *same* object of inquiry, combined with the operation of these oppositional pairs, that produces the 'thermostat' effect I noted towards the end of the chapter. Understanding theology and ethnography as functional opposites in ecclesiology, I argued, left us with problematically caricatured understandings of theology and ethnography, and an unsatisfactory way of relating the two disciplines.²³⁶ I suggested at the end of the chapter that the best way forward would be to take a closer look at how ethnography understands and relates to its *own* object of study, and then take the conversation from there.

The principal purpose of this chapter is to look at how ethnography understands and relates to its own object of study, the social real. Our first task is to complicate concrete ecclesiologies' simplistic view of ethnography. We will undertake this by looking at four different understandings of the ethnographic task: (i) scientific anthropology, (ii) interpretative anthropology, (iii) postmodern anthropology and (iv) pragmatic/relational anthropology. Surveying these four understandings will give us a better understanding of how ethnography understands and engages with its object of study. It will also show us how ethnographic methods are linked to substantial claims about the way the world is, and the way we know about it. Although the concern of the survey is substantially theoretical, its form is historical: we will be looking at the *history* of twentieth century anthropology, a history of scholars constructing and defining their understandings of anthropology in conversation and disagreement with one another.

²³⁶ It also tends to produce arguments about 'starting points', and whether concrete ecclesiologies should begin with social scientific accounts of church communities, define their theological parameters before engaging with ethnography. See Healy's critique of Haight in his 'An Ecclesiology for Receptive Ecumenism?' 2.

Like any history, the story I will tell in this chapter is selective. My focus will largely be on North American and British anthropology. While this means I will miss out a chunk of the tale of twentieth century anthropology by omitting Claude Levi-Strauss and structuralism and (except tangentially) the influence of European sociology, there are good reasons for doing so.²³⁷ Two understandings of the anthropological task I will cover, the interpretative and postmodern, have been dominant during the period in which concrete ecclesiologies have developed. So an interpretative understanding of anthropology was prevalent in the 1970s, but gradually gave way to postmodern concerns from the mid 1980s onwards, which are in turn giving rise to a more pragmatic, or relational, understanding of the anthropological task. As we might expect, then, these understandings of the anthropological task – the hermeneutical and postmodern – correspond to the two dominant kinds of social science used by concrete ecclesiologists. We will be pursuing their connection to concrete ecclesiologies later in the chapter.

The second task of this chapter is to ask what kind of ‘real church’ ethnography can give ecclesiology. If concrete ecclesiologies want to reflect theologically on the real church, they need to attend more closely to what *kind* of real church ethnography can give ecclesiology, and how. So for each of the four understandings of anthropology, we will be asking three interlinked questions, in order to clarify the nature of the ethnographic real: ‘How do anthropologists know?’, ‘What do anthropologists know?’ and ‘What is the resulting character of ethnographic knowledge?’ When we have

²³⁷ The scholars to whom we will turn to explore pragmatic/relational anthropology, Tim Jenkins and Kirsten Hastrup, are both deeply influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, and share his emphasis on the importance of embodiment in talking about social agents and practices. See Kirsten Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology*, 77–98 and Timothy Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 435. Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* contains the major themes upon which Hastrup and Jenkins draw. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

established in what sense ethnography can give ecclesiology an account of the ‘real church’, we will be in a better position to work out how an interdisciplinary discourse might proceed. Like any history, the story I will tell in this chapter is also not simply a straightforward telling of things like they are (or were), but an argument for seeing the task of anthropology a certain way. Specifically, I will be arguing that the fourth (pragmatic/relational) understanding of anthropology is the most satisfactory ethnographically, and the most promising theologically too.

The principal aims of this chapter then, are to provide a more complex understanding of how ethnography relates to the social real, and show what kind of ‘real church’ ethnography can give ecclesiology. A third, background aim is to hedge off particular concrete ecclesiological uses of ethnography. I have already noted that it is very difficult to trace concrete ecclesiologists’ ethnographic influences much further than looking at their bibliographies to see whom they have read. It is for this reason that critical engagement with concrete ecclesiologies’ use of social science will, in this chapter, remain largely implicit. I will focus on explaining and critiquing anthropological understandings from an anthropological perspective: to the extent that concrete ecclesiologists are drawing on those understandings, it is also a criticism of their work, but my work in this chapter will not be focussed on pinning critical tails on ecclesiological donkeys.

We turn, then, to the history of twentieth century anthropology, and to the three questions we will be asking for each of the understandings I will cover: ‘How do anthropologists know?’, ‘What do anthropologists know?’ and ‘What is the resulting character of ethnographic knowledge?’. To simplify the story somewhat, we will be focussing on one representative scholar, or group of scholars, for each understanding

of the anthropological task. We will look at the enduring strengths of each understanding, and also explore its weaknesses, and how these weaknesses result in the rise of new and different understandings of the social real and ethnography's relation to it. We will go into the fourth understanding of anthropology in greater depth. This exploration will open up a new space for conversation with theology. The latter part of the chapter, then, is focussed on initially mapping out that new space for conversation between theology and ethnography, by exploring the similarities between how each relates to its object.

1. Scientific anthropology

We will begin the story with one of the most famous figures, and one of the most famous controversies, in the history of anthropology. In 1925, at the height of an anthropological controversy over cultural determinism, the twenty-three year old Margaret Mead was sent to Samoa by her professor at Columbia University, Franz Boas. Boas' idea was for Mead to study female Samoan adolescents, and ascertain whether their experience of this stage of life was like that of American adolescents – a time of stress, conflict and emotional turbulence. If Mead found that Samoan adolescence was, as for American teenagers, a time of stress, conflict and difficulty, then anthropologists would know that such adolescent troubles were a matter of biology, not culture. If Samoan adolescence proved to be otherwise, it would be a 'negative instance', suggesting that experiences of adolescence were determined by nurture, not nature.²³⁸ Mead's findings, it transpired, gave Boas the answer he was looking for: the turbulent experiences of American adolescents were not shared by the Samoans, and therefore could not be due to the biological effects of adolescence.

²³⁸ Mead, *Coming of Age in Samoa* 12, 17.

Mead described Samoan adolescent girls, and Samoan society in general, as carefree, untroubled, easy and sexually liberated.²³⁹ This is how Derek Freeman summarises her depiction of Samoan adolescence:

What is the most difficult age in American society becomes in Samoa the age of maximum ease, “perhaps the pleasantest time the Samoan girl will ever know.” With “no religious worries,” “no conflicts with their parents,” and “no confusion about sex” to vex the souls of Samoan girls, their development is “smooth, untroubled, unstressed,” and they grow up “painlessly...almost unselfconsciously.”²⁴⁰

Mead’s investigation had an astonishing impact. For anthropologists, Mead’s study seemed to be the decisive empirical contribution that the still-simmering theoretical debate over cultural or biological determinism had been waiting for. The impact of this realisation of the power, even sovereignty, of culture over biology was what made the book a bestseller. Likewise, educational theorists took great interest in the fact that cultural determinism seemed to show humans as essentially malleable. The post-war spirit, which longed to believe that humans could escape the strictures of the status quo and fashion a new future, found Mead’s work a captivating source of hope.²⁴¹

a) A scientific understanding

Although Mead begins her account of Samoan life with an evocative, flowery essay, the basic framework of her study is scientific. Studying adolescence, Mead argues, is not like an experiment in a biological laboratory, where all the necessary variables can

²³⁹ Mead explains that, as the bulk of childcare duties falls on six and seven year old girls, adolescent girls essentially ‘mark time’ for three or four years. Notwithstanding routine tasks like cooking, learning to weave and working on the plantation, an adolescent girl is comparatively carefree. (Mead, *Coming of Age* 33) Mead describes seventeen as the ‘best time’ of a girl’s life, where responsibilities are minimal and ‘all her interest is expended on clandestine sex adventures’ (34).

²⁴⁰ Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* 93–4.

²⁴¹ Mead herself wrote, ‘Realizing that our own ways are not humanly inevitable nor God-ordained, but are the fruit of a long and turbulent history, we may well examine in turn all our institutions, thrown into strong relief against the history of other civilizations, and, weighing them in the balance, be not afraid to find them wanting.’ Mead, *Coming of Age* 186.

be controlled.²⁴² Ruling out the ‘test colony of Herodotus’ approach (isolating babies and recording the results), as well as the possibility of testing hundreds of adolescents from ‘our own civilisation’, Mead states that the only remaining method ‘is that of the anthropologist, to go to a different civilization and make a study of human beings under different cultural conditions in some other part of the world’.²⁴³ Anthropology is the laboratory taken out into the field.²⁴⁴ The anthropologist’s description of a culture simply *is* that culture: Mead argued that ‘to the extent that the anthropologist records the whole pattern of any way of life, that record cannot fade, because it is the way of life itself.’²⁴⁵ She compared *Coming of Age in Samoa* to ‘well-painted portraits of the famous dead...[which]...stand forever for the edification and enjoyment of future generations, forever true because no truer picture could be made of that which is gone.’²⁴⁶

A few years after Mead’s death, in 1983, Derek Freeman disputed Mead’s portrait by publishing a full-scale attack on her methods and conclusions. His claim was simple:

In this book I adduce detailed empirical evidence to demonstrate that Mead’s account of Samoan culture is fundamentally in error. I would emphasize that I am not intent on constructing an alternative ethnography of Samoa. Rather, the evidence I shall present has the specific purpose of scientifically refuting the proposition that Samoa is a negative instance by demonstrating that the depictions on which Mead based this assertion are, in varying degree, mistaken.²⁴⁷

Freeman challenged Mead’s vested interests, the length of her fieldwork, the degree to which her informants had lied to her and tricked her, and her inability to observe male-only rituals. In what James Clifford calls ‘170 pages of empirical overkill’,

²⁴² Mead, *Coming of Age* 12.

²⁴³ Simpler and more primitive societies, she adds, make for better results. See Mead, *Coming of Age* 14.

²⁴⁴ On the ‘natural laboratory’ notion, Geertz comments, ‘...what kind of a laboratory is it where *none* of the parameters are manipulable?’ See *Interpretation of Cultures* 22.

²⁴⁵ Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* 105.

²⁴⁶ Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* 106.

²⁴⁷ Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* xii–xiii.

Freeman challenges Mead on almost every point, from religion, sex and aggression, to childrearing, punishment and experiences of adolescence, arguing that her work is misinformed, misinterpreted and confused.²⁴⁸

b) Difficulties with a scientific approach

Freeman and Mead's scientific rhetoric provides an attractive amount of certainty about their conclusions. As we have already seen in the last chapter, however, the use of straightforwardly scientific rhetoric masks the literary complexity of ethnographies, as well as the degree to which the ethnographer's subjectivity is involved. Freeman's work, Clifford argues, is just as caught up in allegory as Mead's.²⁴⁹ Both are using small, Samoan facts to speak to larger disciplinary arguments and (as Clifford Geertz points out) small facts only speak to larger realities when they are *made to*.²⁵⁰ Freeman leans heavily on the idea of objectively existent facts and evidence but, as Kirsten Hastrup points out, there is not enough distance between facts and evidence for the latter to prove the former.²⁵¹ We have no access to an objective, empirical reality apart from our particular concerns. These shape the way we see that reality to the degree that calling it 'objective' and suggesting it can be a source of value-free facts which can be co-opted into interpretative schemes as evidence is deeply problematic.²⁵² The anthropologist both discovers and creates the other's world at the same time. When we add to these two difficulties – allegory and facts – the obvious

²⁴⁸ On sex and violence, see Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa* 226–53; on etiquette and rivalry, see *ibid.* 131–40. For Clifford's remark, see his 'On Ethnographic Allegory' 102–3.

²⁴⁹ Clifford writes, 'In a revealing final page he admits as much, countering Mead's "Apollonian" sense of cultural balance with biology's "Dionysian" human nature (essential, emotional, etc.) But what is the scientific status of a "refutation" that can be subsumed so neatly by a Western mythic opposition?...Mead and Freeman form a kind of diptych, whose opposing panels signify a recurrent Western ambivalence about the "primitive".' See 'On Ethnographic Allegory' 103.

²⁵⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 23.

²⁵¹ Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 460.

²⁵² Tim Jenkins argues that anthropological accounts 'build in the relation of outside observer to object, as if it were a property of the object itself.' See Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 443.

problem that the anthropologist only has descriptive terms belonging to her own world to describe the other's world, it becomes clear that a 'hard science' approach to anthropology is fatally compromised, even disingenuous.²⁵³ Anthropology cannot relate to the social real in a straightforwardly 'scientific' way. We need an account that makes better sense of the role that the anthropologist's subjectivity plays in the production of anthropological knowledge.

2. *Interpretative anthropology*²⁵⁴

a) *Clifford Geertz*

Although Mead's understanding of anthropology is resolutely scientific, her study marked a turn in twentieth century anthropology, away from preoccupation with racial biology, and towards 'culture'. Anthropology was henceforth to be primarily *cultural* anthropology. But what was 'culture', this distinctive object of anthropological knowledge? And if anthropology's relation to it was not scientific, how was it to be understood? The decades following *Coming of Age in Samoa* saw a flurry of attempts to define what culture itself actually was. By the time Clifford Geertz entered the scene after the Second World War, he was put to work reviewing Kluckhohn's attempt to sort 171 different definitions of culture into thirteen categories.²⁵⁵ Looking back on the plethora of definitions of culture extant during his graduate studies in the 1950s, Geertz recalls that the concept 'culture' back then seemed 'so diffuse and all embracing as to seem like an all-seasons explanation for

²⁵³ See Strathern, 'Out of Context' 256.

²⁵⁴ A Geertzian understanding of anthropology is usually designated as 'symbolic'. Geertz himself prefers 'interpretative', and as I think this more accurate, I will use either 'interpretative' or 'hermeneutical'. See Geertz's comments in Clifford Geertz, *Available Light* 17.

²⁵⁵ Geertz, *Available Light* 12; see also Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 4–5.

anything human beings might contrive to do, imagine, say, be, or believe...We were condemned, it seemed, to working with a logic and a language in which concept, cause, form and outcome had the same name.²⁵⁶ Geertz's lasting contribution to anthropology was his attempt to cut that expansive concept of culture down to size.²⁵⁷ He did so by shifting the focus away from questions about the ontological status of culture, towards questions of meaning. He writes,

The thing to ask about a burlesqued wink or a mock sheep raid is not what their ontological status is. It is the same as that of rocks on the one hand and dreams on the other – they are things of this world. The thing to ask is what their import is: what it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency, is getting said.²⁵⁸

Mention of sheep and winking brings us to Geertz's most well known coinage – 'thick description'.²⁵⁹ Geertz gives the example of two boys rapidly contracting their right eyelids. One does so involuntarily – it is a twitch. The other does so deliberately, according to a social code in which performing that action communicates something – it is a wink. Geertz then adds a third layer, where another boy parodies the second's wink, and a fourth, where a would-be parodier practices winking at home, in front of the bathroom mirror. According to a thin description, all these boys are doing the same thing: rapidly contracting their right eyelid. According to a thick description, one is twitching, one winking, one mocking, and one 'practicing a burlesque of a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking a conspiracy is in motion'.²⁶⁰ Between thin description and thick description, argues Geertz, lies the object of ethnography:

²⁵⁶ Geertz, *Available Light* 12–13.

²⁵⁷ 'It seemed urgent, and it still seems urgent, to make "culture" into a delimited notion, one with a determinate application, a definite sense, and a specified use – the at least somewhat focused subject of an at least somewhat focused social science.' Geertz, *Available Light* 13.

²⁵⁸ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 10.

²⁵⁹ Geertz himself borrows the phrase from Gilbert Ryle. See Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 11.

²⁶⁰ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 7.

a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not (not even the zero-form twitches, which, as a *cultural category*, are as much nonwinks as winks are nontwitches) in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn't do with his eyelids.²⁶¹

Culture, Geertz argues, is a *web of meanings*: 'Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretative one in search of meaning.'²⁶² The task of the anthropologist is to explicate that web of meanings 'from the inside', as it looks to a native participant. So anthropology is a kind of reading over the native's shoulder, 'guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses', gradually constructing a picture of the frames of meaning in which people live their lives.²⁶³ This method means that, for Geertz, culture itself is somewhere between a reality 'out there' and an anthropological construction. The basic metaphor underlying interpretative anthropology is between culture and text.²⁶⁴ Cultures are texts 'out there' to be read, and they can be read well or badly. A good reading, says Geertz, is 'incisive', it 'takes us to the heart of that of which it is the interpretation.'²⁶⁵ But using the same textual metaphor, Geertz also maintains that anthropological constructions are not the culture itself, in the same way that *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* is not *Finnegans Wake*.²⁶⁶ Anthropological explanations are fictive, a construction.²⁶⁷ So at the same time as Geertz sees

²⁶¹ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 7.

²⁶² Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 5.

²⁶³ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 20. He states that 'anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order ones to boot' (15).

²⁶⁴ Ethnographic fieldwork is 'like trying to read a manuscript', and culture is an 'acted document'. See Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 10. Geertz's central proposition is that social realities, from kinship to cockfights, can be read as *texts*: see Geertz, *Available Light* 17.

²⁶⁵ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 18, 25.

²⁶⁶ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 15.

²⁶⁷ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 15.

anthropological knowledge as the clarification of a text out there to be read, he also acknowledges that anthropological knowledge is fashioned.²⁶⁸ Yet he states,

Just why this idea, that cultural description is fashioned knowledge, second hand, so bothers some people is not entirely clear to me... Perhaps it is the result of a fear that to acknowledge that one has put something together rather than found it on a beach is to undermine its claim to true being and actuality. But a chair is culturally (socially, historically...) constructed, a product of acting persons informed of notions not wholly their own, yet you can sit in it, it can be made well or ill, and it cannot, at least in the present state of the art, be made out of water or – this for those haunted by “idealism” – thought into existence.²⁶⁹

What the anthropologist knows is constructed knowledge, but no less real for being so.

Clearly, Geertz's interpretative mode of anthropology addresses many of the difficulties with a rigidly scientific approach. We have already seen that it enables anthropology to move beyond endless discussion over what 'culture' is. It also provides a way of acknowledging anthropological knowledge as both constructed and useful. Interpretative approaches also reinforce a shift (already made by Malinowski), towards documenting and explaining people's practices within their immediate social context. Instead of explaining individual social practices by references to other cultures, Malinowski explained individual Trobriand social practices in terms of their connection to other Trobriand practices.²⁷⁰ The rest, Strathern says, is well known:

this led to a view of individual societies as entities to be interpreted in their own terms, so that both practices and beliefs were to be analysed as intrinsic to a specific social context; that societies so identified were seen as organic wholes, later as systems and structures; and that the comparative enterprise

²⁶⁸ He states that anthropology is 'a bringing to light and definition, not a metaphrase or decoding.' Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 10.

²⁶⁹ Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact* 62.

²⁷⁰ See Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: Routledge, 2002) 8–9. See also Strathern, 'Out of Context' 254.

which modern anthropologists set themselves thus became the comparison of distinct systems.²⁷¹

Geertz's hermeneutical approach clearly follows on from this intra-textual approach to anthropology and, as we shall see, shares both its strengths and weaknesses.

b) Difficulties with interpretative anthropology

Covering three interlinked sets of difficulties with hermeneutical approaches will give us a clearer picture of why alternative approaches have been sought, and a sense of the problems facing concrete ecclesiologists who seek to draw on Geertz's approach. These are not the only difficulties that have been raised with the hermeneutical approach, and they are perhaps not fatal, but they do represent tensions or potential blind spots in its method.²⁷²

The first set of difficulties spring from hermeneutical anthropology's guiding metaphor between culture and text. The problem here is that the idea of 'context' is as much an advantage as a disadvantage. In order to explicate practices 'from the inside', and treat native cultures as coherent wholes, the anthropologist has to do what Marilyn Strathern calls 'framing off'.²⁷³ The advantage is that we can then explicate cultural practices 'in context', according to their own terms and connections. The

²⁷¹ Strathern, 'Out of Context' 254. Malinowski himself did not take much of a systems approach, however: see Strathern, 'Out of Context' 260.

²⁷² For a bibliographic overview of anthropologists' attempts to address the problems I will raise in this section, see Malcolm Crick, 'Anthropology of Knowledge,' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 287–313. For a scientific criticism of Geertz's hermeneutical project, see Paul Shankman, 'Thick and Thin: On the Interpretative Theoretical Program of Clifford Geertz,' *Current Anthropology* 25:3 (1984): 261–80.

²⁷³ Strathern, 'Out of Context' 261. That is, we need to put a decisive break between 'our' culture and 'theirs', so that we can continue to use our language (e.g. about kinship), but empty it of its meaning for us, so that we can fill it with new, different content (e.g. that kinship might be thought of in a particular culture as primarily about trade or exchange, rather than emotion and family). As Strathern puts it, 'Space must be cleared before I can convey the unity of an action which an English-language description renders as a composite of disjunct elements.' Strathern, 'Out of Context' 256.

disadvantage is that, to do this, we need to seek or posit the same coherence in Kwakiutl culture as we do in David Copperfield. The problem of culture-as-text, then, is that it risks making cultures seem more different, more meaningful and more coherent than they are. By trying to 'frame off' the other culture in order to take it seriously, and by trying to explicate its practices in terms of a general web of meaning, anthropologists may exhibit a 'disciplinary vested interest in portraying other peoples' culturally constructed worlds as radically different from our own.'²⁷⁴ Moreover, the judgements by which anthropologists 'frame off' and create the coherent whole they study can leave them leaning heavily on categories that may have little purchase on the ground. This emphasis on cultural coherence also means that any *diversity* of knowledge about a given social practice is seen as problematic.²⁷⁵ Faced with such diversity, the impulse is to make sense out of it, by trying to find some shared meaning 'underneath' the diversity. The problem is, as Keesing points out, that this may result in the anthropologist over-reading, or over-attributing sense or consistency.²⁷⁶ Similarly, any native reflections elicited by the anthropologist's questions about the meanings of various cultural practices may not indicate the 'kernel' or deep meaning of the practice, but rather an extrapolation on what is a fairly basic and unreflected operational understanding.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁴ Roger M Keesing, 'Anthropology as Interpretative Quest,' *Current Anthropology* 28:2 (1987): 161–76 (168). See also See Strathern, 'Out of Context' 256. The most well known debate over these issues arose over Marshall Sahlins' interpretation of the death of Captain Cook, and took place between Sahlins and Sri Lankan anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere. See Clifford Geertz's summary of the debate in Geertz, *Available Light* 97–102.

²⁷⁵ Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 163.

²⁷⁶ Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 167. Keesing suggests this over-reading in connection with understandings of *mana*, a concept widespread in Melanesia, Polynesia and Micronesia. Anthropologists have construed it as an invisible medium of 'spiritual energy' or 'electricity'. Keesing argues that, as objects and spells 'are' *mana* rather than 'have' *mana*, 'that anthropological inferences that sacred objects and humans distinguished by their deeds or rank are "soaked in" or "infused with" mana are reifications of the abstract bordering on absurdity, like inferring that the Pope's crucifix is soaked in sanctity.' See Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 168; see also Roger M Keesing, 'Rethinking Mana,' *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40 (1984): 137–56 on *mana*, and also Roger M Keesing, 'Exotic Readings of Cultural Texts,' *Current Anthropology* 30:4 (1989): 459–79.

²⁷⁷ Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 164. To give a very close-to-home example, asking why Catholic churches use incense elicits a variety of answers: because ancient congregations didn't used to wash,

In addition to these problems of wholeness, interpretative approaches also face problems to do with power. The basic problem here is that talking about cultures in terms of shared meanings tends to obscure power relations.²⁷⁸ To take Marshall Sahlins' extreme example, an Aztec priest and a sacrificial victim may share an understanding of what it means to tear a heart from a living body, but talk of shared meanings in that context obscures both the power relation between the two protagonists, and the degree to which they experience the shared meaning in profoundly different ways.²⁷⁹ Less dramatically, Roger Keesing points out that a hermeneutical approach is not well placed to acknowledge the ways in which '[c]ultures as texts...are differently read, differently construed, by men and women, young and old, experts and non-experts, even in the least complex societies.'²⁸⁰ Keesing argues that attention to how cultural knowledge is produced, controlled and distributed is important. The additional power-related problem is that, as Scholte puts it, 'one cannot merely define men and women in terms of the webs of significance they themselves spin since...few do the actual spinning while the...majority is simply caught.'²⁸¹ To give an account of the way in which people are *caught* by webs, we need an account of culture that takes account of power, and the way in which culture is produced and reproduced by agents at the same time as producing and reproducing the agents themselves.²⁸²

because it symbolises prayers rising to God, because it symbolises purification, to get rid of flies – all rather 'How the Leopard Got His Spots' riffs on a general theme of 'We just do, and always have.'

²⁷⁸ The problem with a hermeneutical 'shared meanings' approach is that 'where feminists and Marxists find oppression, symbolists find meaning.' See Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 166.

²⁷⁹ Marshall Sahlins, 'Reply to Marvin Harris,' *New York Review of Books* (June 28th, 1979): 52–53.

²⁸⁰ Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 161. Kathryn Tanner critiques some postliberal theologies on these grounds in her *Theories of Culture* 42–5.

²⁸¹ Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 162. Keesing's reference to Scholte's quote is incorrect, and I have been unable to trace the original source.

²⁸² As Bhaskar puts it, people do not *create* society: they reproduce and transform it. See Bhaskar, *The Possibility of Naturalism* 42.

Finally, interpretative approaches run into difficulties over how they deal with people's self-understandings. Vincent Crapanzano has critiqued Geertz's famous essay 'Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight' along these lines.²⁸³ Geertz presents a compelling case that cockfights in Bali function as a way of displaying social tension in a society which is very reserved and almost pathologically afraid of situations of open social conflict. His account of the cockfight is a kind of metacommentary on Balinese life. He writes:

An image, fiction, a model, a metaphor, the cockfight is a means of expression; its function is neither to assuage social passions nor to heighten them (though, in its playing-with-fire way it does a bit of both), but, in a medium of feathers, blood, crowds, and money, to display them...Balinese go to cockfights to find out what a man, usually composed, aloof, almost obsessively self-absorbed, a kind of moral autocosm, feels like when attacked, tormented, challenged, insulted, and driven in result to extremes of fury, he has totally triumphed or been brought low.²⁸⁴

Crapanzano points out that Geertz offers no evidence, nor any indication of what those attending the cockfight think.²⁸⁵ He argues that, at least to the Balinese, a cockfight is a cockfight - not a fiction, metaphor, image or anything else.²⁸⁶ Crapanzano acknowledges that Geertz's essay is intended as a piece on how to do interpretation rather than serious ethnography per se, but he has nevertheless raised an important point:

there is in "Deep Play" no understanding of the native from the native's point of view. There is only the constructed understanding of the constructed native's constructed point of view...His constructions of constructions appear to be little more than projections, or at least blurrings, of his point of view, his subjectivity, with that of the native, or more accurately, of the constructed native.²⁸⁷

²⁸³ Vincent Crapanzano, 'Hermes' Dilemma' 53. The original essay 'Deep Play' can be found in Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 412–453.

²⁸⁴ This composite quotation from Geertz's 'Deep Play' is found in Crapanzano's essay: see 'Hermes' Dilemma' 73. For the original context, see Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 444, 450.

²⁸⁵ See also William Roseberry, 'Balinese Cockfights and the Seduction of Anthropology,' *Social Research* 49:4 (1982): 1013–28 for criticism along these lines.

²⁸⁶ Crapanzano, 'Hermes' Dilemma' 73.

²⁸⁷ Crapanzano, 'Hermes' Dilemma' 74.

Geertz engages with the reader, but not with the Balinese – they remain, as Crapanzano points out, cardboard cut-outs.²⁸⁸ In a telling metaphor, Geertz talks about culture as an ensemble of texts that the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulder of those to whom they belong.²⁸⁹ Crapanzano's criticism is that this 'over the shoulder' approach may work with texts and literary criticism, but cannot pass muster in a discipline that seeks to describe and analyse human actors and social realities.²⁹⁰

We will look in the next section at how postmodern anthropology seeks to foreground personal experience much more than interpretative approaches. Yet Crapanzano's worry here is not just about where individual Balinese voices have gone. He is also signalling a deeper worry about whether Balinese voices act as a *brake* on the anthropologists' freestyle interpretative efforts. There is a question here about how we *evaluate* anthropologists' interpretations. Geertz suggests that a good interpretation is one that 'takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation'.²⁹¹ He suggests that a study is 'an advance if it is more incisive – whatever that may mean – than those that preceded it.'²⁹² This, he acknowledges, raises problems of verification, but he suggests this is a virtue of the interpretative approach.²⁹³ Shankman critiques this fiercely, suggesting that it leaves the anthropologist's intellectual imagination a large area over which to roam unchecked.²⁹⁴ Shankman wants a return to a less fuzzy, more definite kind of science. Yet, while I agree with Denis Dutton's response to Shankman that it is '[b]etter to be

²⁸⁸ Crapanzano, 'Hermes' Dilemma' 71.

²⁸⁹ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 18.

²⁹⁰ Hastrup argues that there is no need to reverse ethnocentrism and unquestioningly privilege the native's point of view, but that anthropology also cannot bypass people's self-understandings. See Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology* 148.

²⁹¹ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 18.

²⁹² Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 25.

²⁹³ Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* 16.

²⁹⁴ Shankman, 'Thick and Thin' 264.

left with honest questions than...phony answers which persuade only by mimicking the language of science', Crapanzano's worry remains.²⁹⁵ Though there may be no fixed and firm criteria with which we can verify or falsify a given anthropological account, this does not mean there are no criteria whatsoever, other than interpretative appeal. Anyone who has ridden a poorly maintained bicycle down a steep hill knows that squashy brakes are better than no brakes at all.

3. *Postmodern anthropology*

Despite the gains of interpretative anthropology, the difficulties created by Geertz's analogy between culture and text are legion. However, as Marilyn Strathern puts it, while the metaphor of culture of text has certainly had its day, symbolic anthropology has not.²⁹⁶ The group of scholars that I will call 'postmodern anthropology' attempt to build on Geertz's gains, while shaking off the difficulties that come with a culture-as-text approach. We will see that postmodern anthropology is characterised by an acute awareness of Geertz's blind spots. As the name I have allotted to it suggests, it is also responding to a second set of issues – those raised by postmodernity. In his autobiographical reflections, *After the Fact*, Geertz writes,

The moral and epistemological vertigo that struck the culture generally in the post-structuralist, post-modernist, post-humanist age, the age of turns and texts, of the evaporated subject and the constructed fact, struck the social sciences with particular force.²⁹⁷

While Geertz himself faced these dizzying changes with characteristic equanimity, other anthropologists were keener to take the challenges of postmodernity to the heart of their discipline. Postmodern anthropology is responding not only to the weaknesses of the interpretative approach that we have just covered, but also to what

²⁹⁵ Denis Dutton, response to Shankman, 'Thick and Thin' 272–3 (273).

²⁹⁶ Strathern, response to Keesing, 'Interpretative Quest' 173–4 (174).

²⁹⁷ Geertz, *After the Fact* 128.

we might call a postmodern crisis of representation. We can explore postmodern anthropology's central insights through looking at these responses: first, its emphasis on individual experience and the relationship between knowledge and power, second, its attention to the role of the anthropologist and, third, its move away from cultural holism towards studies of hybridity and globalism. We will foreground the work of a scholar who, though not an anthropologist, has considerably influenced the path of anthropology over the last thirty years: James Clifford.

a) Anthropology, power and representation

James Clifford is a cultural historian and critical theorist, yet over the last thirty years he has fulfilled the function of an anthropologist in relation to the anthropological community itself, studying and analysing its practices, methods and writings.²⁹⁸ If interpretative anthropology thought of its task as discovering and mapping cultural discourses, Clifford has drawn attention to the fact that anthropology itself is a cultural discourse, with its own ideas about what constitutes ethnographic authority, persuasiveness and accuracy. If the guiding metaphor of hermeneutical anthropology was between culture and text, the guiding metaphor of postmodern anthropology is between the anthropological task and *textual production*.

Anthropology's new self-awareness has focussed on what happens between field and text, and how one gets from a fieldwork situation, in which the anthropologist encounters a plurality of views and experiences, to a single, coherent written account of how a given culture functions. Postmodern approaches are nervous about

²⁹⁸ See Paul Rabinow's comment in Paul Rabinow, 'Discourse and Power: On the Limits of Ethnographic Texts,' *Dialectical Anthropology* 10 (1985): 1–13 (3).

interpretative anthropology's emphasis on shared meanings and cultural coherence, acutely aware that these emphases risk privileging the voices of the powerful meaning-makers in a society, and tidying away or silencing dissenting voices and different experiences. Postmodern approaches are also more chary of generalising about experience – as Crapanzano puts it, a whole people do not share a single subjectivity, so we do not necessarily have grounds for extending the emotions, motives or meanings attributed to one actor to others, or to the culture in general.²⁹⁹ This heightened consciousness leads to a number of methodological changes in postmodern anthropology. First, we see an increased emphasis on individuals, and on presenting individuals as such in the anthropological texts. The genres of ethnography and biography come closer together.³⁰⁰ So instead of Evans-Pritchard's generic 'the Nuer', we have Marjorie Shostak's description of !Kung life through the eyes of one woman, Nisa.³⁰¹ Second, we see attempts to make ethnographic texts 'polyphonic' or 'heteroglossial', that is, to include in them the voices of informants. We can see the individual and polyphonic trends converge in Kevin Dwyer's *Moroccan Dialogues* of 1982, which is simply an annotated transcript of conversations between the anthropologist, Dwyer, and a Moroccan farmer.³⁰² These methodological moves are partly a way of assuaging worries over the ethnographer's authority, which we will look at further below. They are also a result of worries over representation – whether we truly *can* represent other cultures or individuals without making them a distorted

²⁹⁹ Crapanzano, 'Hermes' Dilemma' 74.

³⁰⁰ See, for example James Clifford, *Person and Myth: Maurice Leenhardt in the Melanesian World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), or Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami, Portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980).

³⁰¹ Marjorie Shostak, *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

³⁰² Kevin Dwyer, *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982). See Geertz's discussion of this in his Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988) 95–6, 98.

image of ourselves. They are attempts to manifest in textual form the *collaborative* way anthropological knowledge is produced in the field.³⁰³

As well as increased emphasis on leaving ethnographic studies messy and multi-voiced, we also see much more of the *anthropologist* in postmodern anthropological writings.³⁰⁴ Scholars like Clifford turned the spotlight anthropology shines on other cultures onto anthropology itself, and asked how ethnographic authority is established. Post-Malinowski, at least, it seemed that the anthropologist established their authority in relation to a given culture by demonstrating that they had ‘been there’, usually with an arrival narrative, and then fading away behind objectivising language and generalisations: ‘the Nuer do this’ and ‘the Nuer do that’.³⁰⁵ What we get in postmodernity is the *reappearance* of the anthropologist in the text, as anthropologists struggle to negotiate questions surrounding authority, subjectivity and representation.³⁰⁶ Again, this causes methodological changes, and we see the anthropologist making more frequent appearances in the text. Language of scientific objectivity is tempered by more emphasis on the fieldworker’s own bodiliness, experience and emotion.³⁰⁷ While these stylistic changes are fairly widespread, an extreme example of such personalisation might be Sarah Caldwell’s *Oh Terrifying*

³⁰³ As Stephen Tyler puts it, postmodern anthropology foregrounds dialogue over monologue. See Stephen A Tyler, ‘Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document,’ in ed. Clifford and Marcus, *Writing Culture* 122–140 (126).

³⁰⁴ I wrote in chapter one about the way postmodernity causes the theologian to ‘emerge’ - we are dealing here with the same phenomenon.

³⁰⁵ Crapanzano’s essay ‘Hermes Dilemma’ has an excellent meta-ethnographic comparative study of how the authority of the ethnographic witness is established in works by Catlin, Goethe and Geertz. See ‘Hermes’ Dilemma’ 54–76.

³⁰⁶ A good literature survey of such approaches can be found in George E Marcus, and Dick Cushman, ‘Ethnographies as Texts,’ *Annual Review of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 25–69.

³⁰⁷ For a reflection on emotion and fieldwork, see Renato Rosaldo’s personal account in Renato Rosaldo, ‘Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage,’ in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, ed. Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), and Geertz’s discussion in Geertz, *Works and Lives* 14–15. For an emphasis on bodiliness, see Loïc Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

Mother, a study of Kali worshippers that juxtaposes the finished ethnographic text with highly personal excerpts from Caldwell's diary during the same period.³⁰⁸

The third characteristic of postmodern anthropology that we should note is its move away from ideas of cultural holism. Where interpretative anthropology emphasises shared meanings, postmodern anthropology is more likely to foreground conflict. Interpretative anthropology's tendency to 'frame off' the other culture gives way to a postmodern tendency to write on hybrid cultures or subaltern groups within society. Likewise, we see a rise in 'auto-ethnography' - anthropologists studying their own home cultures. Increasingly aware of globalisation and the way in which particular cultures are caught up in global dynamics of power and economy, anthropologists have begun to study non-traditional communities, like internet discussion forums and online churches.³⁰⁹ All these moves reflect postmodern ethnography's belief that cultures are not bounded wholes, spatially or symbolically, and that they are better defined by specifying connections and interactions between individuals.

What do these three methodological changes tell us about the way postmodern anthropology thinks about the object of anthropology, the way in which anthropologists know it, and the nature of anthropological knowledge itself? There is obviously a much clearer sense that the anthropologist's subjectivity is involved in the production of anthropological knowledge. Far from being a hindrance, or to be minimised in the field, emotional involvement can become a source of knowledge and understanding. Where Clifford Geertz described 'going native' as 'an impractical idea, inevitably bogus', Loïc Wacquant suggests the *task* of the anthropologist is to go

³⁰⁸ Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Goddess Kali* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁰⁹ See, for example, Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2000).

native, but to do so armed with the tools of anthropological analysis.³¹⁰ In terms of the object of anthropology, the social real, we have seen that postmodern anthropology focuses less on the 'web of meaning' as a coherent reality 'out there', and more on the way culture can be seen in connections between individuals.³¹¹

Like interpretative anthropology, postmodern anthropology has some significant advantages. Its concern for the place of the anthropologist makes it arguably more reflexive than interpretative approaches, and its greater emphasis on power relations makes it better able to take account of the complex and contested ways in which cultural meanings are constructed and shared. What, though, of its disadvantages? Geertz's interpretative scheme provoked harsh criticism from anthropologists wanting to keep anthropology closer to the physical sciences than the humanities. Postmodern anthropology comes in for even fiercer criticism from the same quarters, for adding a deconstructionist turn to the hermeneutical one. Sangren, for example, accuses postmodern ethnographers of using rhetorical critique to undermine traditional anthropology's claims to authority, whilst simultaneously 'inoculating' their own work against similar critiques.³¹² He sees in this a very clear will to power, arguing that the postmodernist position confers upon the 'young scholar'

a rhetoric of delegitimation of academic authority figures and a masked legitimation of her/his own position. At the same time, the eschewal of "totalizing" theory allows the postmodernist the luxury of experimenting without taking on the responsibility for defending the logic of his/her arguments.³¹³

³¹⁰ Geertz, *Available Light* 16. For Wacquant's idea of 'going native armed', see Chris Scharen's promising paper, 'Ethnographic Notes Towards a Carnal Ecclesiology'. Scharen's reference is to Loïc Wacquant, 'Habitus as Topic and Tool: Reflections on becoming a prizefighter' in *Ethnographies Revisited: Constructing Theory in the Field*, ed. William Shaffir, Antony Puddephatt and Steven Kleinknecht (New York: Routledge, 2009) 137–51.

³¹¹ See Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths' in ed. Clifford and Marcus *Writing Culture* 1–26 (15).

³¹² P Steven Sangren, 'Rhetoric and the Authority of Ethnography: "Postmodernity" and the Social Reproduction of Texts,' *Current Anthropology* 29:3 (1988): 405–35 (407).

³¹³ Sangren, 'Rhetoric' 422, 414.

While things may not be quite so rotten in the state of Denmark as Sangren insinuates, postmodern ethnography does have its problems.

b) Weaknesses in postmodern anthropology

The first set of problems arises around postmodern anthropology's critique of classic anthropologies, and their increased attention to how authority is constructed in anthropological texts. Their interest in ethnographic authority and the increased *visibility* of the ethnographer in postmodern texts inevitably brings with it the charge of 'navel gazing', but this is not really the problem.³¹⁴ The problem is that ethnographic authority cannot be displaced. Close attention to postmodern texts suggests that the ethnographer's authority is still being constructed and asserted, just in different ways. Paul Roth points to the new emphasis on the anthropologist's emotions, and argues that *experience* has become the new location of authority: self-exposure is now what gives the anthropologist the authority to expose others.³¹⁵ Geertz draws attention to the same phenomenon: sincerity, not detachment, has become the new literary marker of authority.³¹⁶ Roth's argument is that, despite stylistic changes to anthropological texts, there is nothing different about the way in which anthropologists are conducting anthropological fieldwork, or thinking about the authority and accuracy of their work. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*: there is, Roth argues, no *epistemological* change here, just a cosmetic one.³¹⁷ Given that authority is always constructed, and it is just a matter of how, Roth sees no

³¹⁴ Rabinow argues that increased attention to anthropologists and academic institutions is a good thing. See Rabinow, 'Discourse and Power' 11–12.

³¹⁵ Paul A Roth, 'Ethnography Without Tears,' *Current Anthropology* 30:5 (1989): 555–69.

³¹⁶ Geertz, *Works and Lives* 99.

³¹⁷ Roth, 'Ethnography Without Tears' 555. He writes, 'Clifford suggests that tortured self-consciousness regarding the social construction of knowledge is somehow emancipatory, but we await any demonstration that such accounts reveal much beyond the ambivalences of their authors.' (559).

intrinsic merit in postmodern ethnographies.³¹⁸ The window display changes, but the goods and the shopkeeper do not.

The same criticisms have been brought against postmodern ethnography's emphasis on the necessity for 'polyphonic' or 'heteroglossic' texts. Roth again argues that '[h]eteroglossia does not guarantee authenticity or insight; it is largely beside the epistemological point.'³¹⁹ Adding in different voices, he suggests, does not change what we *do* in the field. There are two critical points here worth pursuing. The first concerns the *intention* of such multi-voiced or multi-authored texts. If, as Hatch suggests, the intent is to remove the ethnographic writer from between the reader and the subject, then it is an avoidance of ethnographic responsibility.³²⁰ That is, using many voices or unedited interview transcripts to suggest that the 'other' is being presented transparently masks the degree to which the anthropologist's interests, questions, concerns and assumptions still shape the ethnographic encounter. Anthropological authority, and anthropological responsibility, cannot be displaced. The second criticism of postmodern anthropology's efforts to lessen the angst of ethnographic authority is that it confuses text and world. As Sangren puts it, literary power and cultural power are not the same thing.³²¹ We do not create a more equal world by giving everyone an equal voice in the ethnographic text.³²²

³¹⁸ Strathern agrees that authority is constructed, one way or the other, but finds postmodern approaches more interesting and worthy of note than Roth. See her comments on Roth, 'Ethnography Without Tears' 565–6.

³¹⁹ Roth, 'Ethnography Without Tears' 559.

³²⁰ See Elvin Hatch's comments on Strathern, 'Out of Context' 271–2 (272). Paul Rabinow concurs: '...those of us who produce texts must face up to the fact that we can never avoid the author function. There are no transparent ethnographies.' See Rabinow, 'Discourse and Power' 3.

³²¹ Sangren, 'Rhetoric' 411.

³²² See David Sapiro's comments on Roth, 'Ethnography Without Tears', 564–5 (565). Rabinow suggests a very helpful set of questions: 'There seem to be at least four interconnected but different dimensions at issue: (1) aesthetic (or formal): what devices could be used to introduce a more inventive or imaginative dimension into anthropological books and arguments? (2) epistemological: would bringing more voices into the text (however represented) produce a truer anthropology?; (3) ethical: is it incumbent on anthropologists to introduce a dialogic element into the text? Do we want to constitute ourselves as the kind of subjects who are in dialogue with other equal subjects? (4) political:

The criticism that perhaps sticks best to postmodern ethnography is that it fails to escape the Geertzian analogy between culture and text. Worries about how interpretative approaches fail to attend to issues of power in the production of meaning are translated into worries about whether marginal views and individual experience are adequately represented on a textual level. As Rabinow puts it, *textual production* now becomes the guiding metaphor for the anthropological encounter.³²³ What is the difficulty with this? Sapire, Sangren, Rabinow and Roth suggest that it confuses epistemological, literary and political issues, and so it may well do. I think the chief difficulty, however, is that it leads postmodern ethnography to counterbalance the problems of interpretative anthropology without undoing them.

Postmodern anthropologies recognise the connection between power and meaning-making in any given society. The dominant meanings in any given society both form individual subjects' frameworks of understanding, and render certain people's views and experiences marginal. To take a simple example, dominant understandings about the meaning of shopping form people's understanding of the basics of buying and selling, and render certain people's views (e.g. shoplifters) marginal or deviant. The difficulty in postmodern anthropology is that the enduring analogy between culture and text means that the power of society to shape people's understandings and exclude certain perspectives becomes associated with the power of the anthropologist to sort, silence and privilege different voices.³²⁴ This is, of course, correct, insofar as

will the field of either world or local power relations be effectively changed if we write different texts?' See Rabinow, 'Discourse and Power' 5.

³²³ Rabinow, 'Discourse and Power' 6.

³²⁴ 'Perceived paradoxes in the social scientific (scientistic?) need/desire to create closed, fictionalized, textual "representations" of society, on the one hand, and the fact that subjects have differing perspectives on the world, on the other, are the result of collapsing the dialectical relation between the

the anthropologist's account of a given society understands, say, property transfer, is bound to reproduce the dominant understandings of that process: that women cannot own property, and so on. Their society has become our text; our text becomes their society.

The *difficulty* here is that postmodern ethnography's solution to this problem results in inverting it rather than unpicking it. In order to combat anthropology's tendency to reproduce societal power structures, postmodern ethnographers want to hold onto individual voices, and the experience of the marginalised. This is, in itself, quite sensible, if anthropology is not to reproduce, alongside a given society's dominant power structures, that society's *blindness* to certain people's experience. But hand in hand with this textual privileging of the individual subject goes an understanding of culture that also privileges the individual subject. James Clifford argues that culture is 'always relational, an inscription of communicative processes that exist, historically, *between* subjects in relations of power.'³²⁵ Sangren argues that although culture is reproduced by communication between subjects, understanding it as *only* that is problematic: "“meaning” and “culture” are not merely the negotiations “between” subjects in acts of “communication”; such acts of communication are inevitably embedded in encompassing systems of power and meaning.'³²⁶ This more individual emphasis, combined with postmodern anthropology's determination to preserve minority voices, can slip easily into imagining that 'getting it right' in ethnographic description means preserving the irreducibility of experience. The more that anthropologists pick and choose, or smooth over anomalies in the experiences they report, the further they get from reality. The danger here is that anthropology gets

social reproduction of individual consciousness and the social reproduction of society to the single level of “text” or “discourse.” Sangren, 'Rhetoric' 417.

³²⁵ Clifford, 'Introduction: Partial Truths' 15.

³²⁶ Sangren, 'Rhetoric' 417.

trapped in the search for ever-more detailed 'horizontal' ethnographic descriptive generalisations, simply collating experience rather than explaining how it is formed.³²⁷ The temptation is then to imagine that, if only we tried hard enough, we could achieve a 'wall-to-wall' description.³²⁸

Sangren wants to reverse postmodern ethnography's direction entirely, and return to a much more realist and scientific approach to culture, which focuses on the level of 'encompassing systems'. As we will see in the next section, I think Sangren's call for the return of a more scientific paradigm misplaced. Briefly noting why will introduce us to two of the scholars we will be working with in the next section - Marilyn Strathern and Kirsten Hastrup. Strathern finds faults with the postmodernist turn, but is also not content with criticisms of it that 'reinstate the very distance between subject and object, author and text, that at least some postmodernist productions attempt to overcome.'³²⁹ Sangren's return to a more scientific view will not pull anthropology out of the difficulties with either the interpretative or the postmodern turns, and risks jeopardizing their gains. Kirsten Hastrup unpacks the opposition we need to escape more clearly:

Largely modernist 'methodological nationalism' (or 'culturalism'), gave both logical and historical priority to the system – the whole – over individuals...Conversely, the 'methodological individualism' of various postmodern trends made the opposite claim and gave logical priority to the individual act. Both now seem unsatisfactory because they reproduce an untenable opposition between the whole and the part, whether they be named structure and agent, society and individual, or history and biography. At present, anthropology struggles to get beyond the implicit determinism of both the modernist and post-modernist epoch.³³⁰

³²⁷ For the horizontal/vertical distinction, see Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 458 and Kirsten Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology. Towards a Pragmatic Enlightenment?' *Social Anthropology* 13:2 (2005): 133–49 (143).

³²⁸ Jenkins points out that the category of knowledge cannot be mapped in such a totalising way, because it is constructed in the construal of specific encounters. See Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 452.

³²⁹ See Strathern's comments on Roth, 'Ethnography Without Tears', 565–6 (566).

³³⁰ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 138. It is for this reason that I think Tim Jenkins' and Nick Adams' discussion of the difference between anthropology and theology as the way each discipline works from parts and wholes (anthropology from parts; theology from wholes) is lacking. It involves us again in

c) Summary

Thus far we have covered two influential understandings of the anthropological task and the nature of anthropology's object – culture. Interpretative anthropology sees culture as the web of meanings that people spin about them, and anthropology as the clarification, study and analysis of those webs. Postmodern anthropology sees culture as more of an anthropological construct, and anthropology as the task of analysing the relationships and communicative exchanges between subjects. Both of these, we saw, had their difficulties. Interpretative anthropology's reliance on the idea of cultures as holistic texts led to a risk of over-attributing coherence, sense and otherness. Its tendency to bypass people's self-understandings also left us unsure as to how interpretative anthropology's constructions and explanations could be evaluated. Postmodern anthropology did not escape the Geertzian association between culture and text, and so the measures it took to counterbalance the problems of interpretative anthropology tipped it too far in the opposite direction, into methodological individualism.³³¹ What we need, it seems, is what Kirsten Hastrup identifies: a way of getting beyond the 'implicit determinism' of the interpretative and postmodern approaches, that is, a way of thinking about culture that neither makes it an aggregate of individual actors' experiences, nor a totally impersonal force. We need a different

narrow and caricatured understandings of the tasks and character of ethnography and theology, which leave both disciplines (and certainly any effort to work inter-disciplinarily) very shortchanged. See Nicholas Adams and Timothy Jenkins, 'Parts and Wholes'. The following discussion of pragmatic/relational anthropology (drawing on Jenkins' own work) will give us a more detailed understanding of how anthropology deals with parts and wholes. For discussion of how ecclesiology simultaneously deals with parts and wholes, see chapter four 217–9.

³³¹ Methodological individualism is the belief that society is ontologically reducible to individuals. See Bhaskar, *Possibility of Naturalism* 34. Bhaskar argues that 'sociology is not concerned, as such, with large-scale, mass or group behaviour (conceived as the behaviour of large groups of individuals). Rather, it is concerned, at least paradigmatically, with the persistent *relations* between individuals (and groups), and with the relations between these relations (and between such relations and the nature and the products of such relations).' (35).

way of thinking about the relationship between whole and part. It also seems that we need a better account of how the ethnographer herself is engaged in the production of ethnographic knowledge – an account that is able to leave behind the Scylla and Charybdis of ‘objectivism’ and ‘subjectivism’.

3. Pragmatic/relational anthropology

Thus far, the history I have told has focussed on American anthropology. Now the history comes closer to home, as we turn to an English anthropologist, Timothy Jenkins, and a Danish anthropologist, Kirsten Hastrup. The story also comes closer to home in that both Jenkins and Hastrup have written on the anthropology of religion. I will call this kind of anthropology ‘pragmatic/relational’ for want of a better handle – Hastrup has recently called her project ‘pragmatic’ and ‘topographical’ and Jenkins has not (to my knowledge) called his particular approach anything at all.³³² Pragmatism, however, seem to characterise the approach well enough.³³³ As we will be building on this view in the chapters that follow, we will go into it in greater depth.

a) Anthropological subjectivity and everyday life

³³² See Hastrup, ‘Social Anthropology’ 144–7, where she also refers to anthropology’s latest turn as ‘topographic’ (144); see also Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology*, where she describes her approach as pragmatic (26).

³³³ Hastrup writes, ‘In the modernist era, anthropological knowledge was presented as knowledge about other cultures; it consisted in largely ontological propositions about the organization of (other) social systems and thoughts. The result was an encyclopaedic knowledge that posited itself as an *object*-knowledge – in the triple sense of attaching itself to objects, working by way of objectification, and itself becoming an object to be possessed and recycled. Gradually, this view outlived itself, because it was realized that most of what had passed for ontology in anthropology was in fact located in our experience of it, and in the way in which it was registered – or silenced. In consequence, knowledge has become – and must be – acknowledged (implicitly, at least) as *relational*, both in the sense that it attaches itself to relations between people or between people and objects and in the sense that it emerges within a dialogical field.’ See Hastrup, ‘Getting it Right’ 456.

So, returning to our first question, how is it that anthropologists know what they know? Pragmatic/relational anthropology's answer to this question not only makes good sense of the subjectivity of the anthropologist: it also unpicks the difficult relationship between whole and part that troubles interpretative and postmodern anthropology. As with postmodern anthropology, subjectivity is important, but the emphasis falls less on empathy and sincerity, and more on pragmatism. The key here is the parallel pragmatic/relational anthropology draws between anthropological knowledge, and knowledge of everyday life.³³⁴ Anthropological knowledge and the knowledge of everyday life are alike insofar as both are self-involving, and neither can be neutral: 'Knowledge of everyday life', writes Jenkins, 'is not available to the disinterested gaze of an inquirer; rather, fieldwork is an apprenticeship of signs, a process of entry into a particular world'.³³⁵ Unlike an interpretative approach, a pragmatic/relational approach does not assume that a social system is homogenous, or that all social actors know the same things, or share the same meanings. This means that the anthropologist, like the social actors, cannot observe the social as a whole from the outside, but only experience it from within.³³⁶ The social space can only be perceived from the inside, 'when anthropologists place themselves in the field of tension between the individual and the social in the same way as local protagonists.'³³⁷ This means that the anthropologist has to take up one of the roles offered to her by the

³³⁴ Jenkins writes, 'The fieldwork experience exemplifies the normal condition of social knowledge...Social life, indeed, is made up of these acts of mutual interpretation, and the anthropologist, like any other actor, needs to create protocols, through acquiring various habits, skills and savoir-faire that will allow him or her to participate in it.' See 'Fieldwork' 442–3.

³³⁵ Jenkins writes, '...fieldwork, like indigenous life, is characterized by a series of apprenticeships... See Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 445.

³³⁶ 'The social' is not then transparent, and cannot be 'seen' at a glance, even by an experienced actor. It is not a homogenous space, open to the inspection either of the people who make it up or of the anthropologist, but is complex and heterogenous, made up of differing and exclusive realms, of public and private, even secret, knowledge and deeds.' Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 441.

³³⁷ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 140.

community.³³⁸ It is the experience of playing different roles, misinterpreting offers, gaining particular knowledge and encountering resistance from informants that allows us to understand social life from the inside:

The anthropologist gets caught up in the series of events that constitute social life, where there is no objective truth, but simply potentially exclusive versions of the truth that together constitute the event.³³⁹

Subjectivity is, Jenkins says, the price one pays to do fieldwork.³⁴⁰ Yet the anthropologist's subjectivity is not an unfortunate and unavoidable fact: it is quite simply the condition for the possibility of anthropological knowledge. The anthropologist is no 'ideal metering device'; her ability as an anthropologist depends on experiencing the force of detail in everyday life, and recasting it in theoretical mode.³⁴¹ Anthropological fieldwork, then, involves participating and being changed.³⁴² Hastrup talks about the anthropologist as a map-maker, experiencing the terrain of the social, and then abstracting it into a map, 'taking seriously both the movements of the social agents, and the paths they carve out, physically and socially, through their way-finding.'³⁴³ The challenge of anthropological writing then, as

³³⁸ Jenkins points out that the role offered is that of outsider, but that this is not to be regretted: 'if we accept that there is no homogeneous 'insider's' knowledge to be achieved, this state is again characteristic of social life.' See Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 446. For an excellent discussion of how the anthropologist must take up a position in a social situation in which neutrality is not an option, see Jeanne Favret-Saada's excellent discussion of investigating witchcraft in the Bocage, Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage*, trans. Catherine Cullen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). She writes, 'If I am to describe witchcraft in the Bocage, it can only be done by going over the situations in which I was myself given a position. The only empirical evidence I have of the existence of such positions, and of the manner in which they relate to each other consists of fragments of narrative. My mistakes, and sometimes my refusals or evasions are part of the text; each answer I gave my interlocutors was, like their question, part of the fact under investigation.' (25). For further material on the role of the anthropologist's subjectivity in eliciting answers on clandestine knowledge, see Hastrup's account of researching the *huldufólk* in Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 465; see also Jenkins' account of the cattle market ('Fieldwork' 435–7) and 'folklorising by the folk' ('Fieldwork' 449).

³³⁹ Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 443.

³⁴⁰ Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 443.

³⁴¹ See Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology* 22. The idea of the anthropologist as an 'ideal metering device' is Edward Ardener's; it is quoted in Strathern, 'Out of Context' 258.

³⁴² Jenkins writes, '...the autobiographical tale of conducting fieldwork, if it is honestly told, often takes the form of a *Confessions*, an account of the wrong assumptions, oversights, blindness to the obvious, insensitivity and social gaffes made by the anthropologist who thought that he – or she – knew what was going on when he or she did not.' Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 442.

³⁴³ See Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 145.

Clifford Geertz puts it, is how to sound simultaneously like a pilgrim and a cartographer.³⁴⁴

b) The emergent object

The method of participant observation is, of course, at least as old as Malinowski. The difference here is that Hastrup and Jenkins want to put anthropology's distinctive method, fieldwork, at the heart of accounts of anthropological epistemology, and at the heart of accounts of anthropological knowledge. *How* anthropologists know is deeply bound up with *what* anthropologists know. We have seen above that anthropologists know social reality not by chasing after parts, and collating individual experiences, nor by chasing after wholes, and positing an objective, shared social reality, whether that be 'meaning' or 'knowledge'.³⁴⁵ Rather, anthropologists know by placing themselves in what Hastrup calls the 'field of tension' between individual and social.³⁴⁶ Hastrup argues that it is the constant interplay between individual and social, the way that part and whole constantly mutually create and re-create one another, that makes the anthropological object *emergent*.³⁴⁷ What does this mean? Taking a closer look at Tim Jenkins' fieldwork in a Cambridgeshire village in his *Religion in English Everyday Life* will show us how, according to pragmatic/relational anthropology, the object of anthropological inquiry is three things: emergent, abstract and constructed.

³⁴⁴ Geertz, *Works and Lives* 10.

³⁴⁵ 'Because fieldwork is no longer seen as a matter of mapping social systems and clarifying their nature but rather as a matter of engaging and radically interpreting lived social worlds, anthropologists are bound to address the mutuality of the whole and the part, however these terms are defined.' Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 138–9. The challenge, as Hastrup puts it, is to explain the connection between the individual and the social without making one a side effect of the other (140).

³⁴⁶ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 140.

³⁴⁷ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 139.

Jenkins' account of the church of St. Mary's is prefixed with a broader picture of the village, Comberton, in which it is situated. Understandings of what 'the village' is are divided, split between old villagers, descendents of agricultural labourers whose families have lived in the village for generations, and incomers, wealthier urbanites who use the village as a commuting base for nearby Cambridge. Both groups express their self-understandings in opposition and reaction to the self-expressions of the other, in a mesh of constructions, misunderstandings and disagreements. Incomers have an urbanized view of what the village should be like - a self-sufficient, intimate and mutually supportive community. This is in turn resisted by and capitalized on by the old villagers, whose more feudal understanding sees the village as a complex of hierarchical and reciprocal relationships of service. Jenkins writes,

There is, therefore, in the village an economy or exchange of fantasies, in which notions of the village, the villager and the incomer circulate, serving as the currency which allows each perspective to interact with the others...If 'the village' exists at all, it exists in these mutual explorations and misunderstandings of mutually incompatible systems of interpretation, each with its own preoccupations and patterns into which the actions of others are fitted.³⁴⁸

Although Jenkins encounters divergent understandings of what the village and the church are, this lack of shared meaning is not a problem. Nor is an adequate anthropological account of the village or the church dependent on preserving as many of these divergent viewpoints as possible. What Jenkins is suggesting is that the object of anthropological knowledge *emerges* in this 'economy of fantasies'. As individuals express their own views, interpret one another's actions, disagree with one another and act on the basis of assumptions, they draw upon unspoken collective understandings of what the village is or is not. These collective understandings are neither fully understood nor followed blindly; they are (as Kirsten Hastrup puts it),

³⁴⁸ Timothy Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life: An Ethnographic Approach* (Oxford: Bergahn Books, 1999) 59.

‘part of the background knowledge that makes people sense the horizon of a ‘we’.’³⁴⁹

It is from these enduring collective understandings that the anthropologist can construct ‘the village’ or ‘the country church’. The object of anthropological inquiry, then, is produced by the ‘economy of fantasies’ – it is unstable, relied upon by all the actors (including the anthropologist), but not reducible to any one understanding.³⁵⁰

The object of ethnographic interest is an *emergent*, rather than fixed reality, and it exists only on an abstract, constructed level.³⁵¹ It is worth quoting Jenkins’ conclusion at length in order to explain this:

the reality that defines the country church is not located in people’s minds, in their opinions, ideas and wishes, but in the assumptions and collective categories that they (often unreflectingly) call upon and, moreover, in the interactions of these categories and assumptions...the reality that constrains and determines what is the country church is of a different order to the minds and to the persons that make it up; it is to be found in the mutual interaction and interpretation of the often mutually incomprehending actors...The country church exists only at this level, in a compendium of experiences, behaviours, misunderstandings and so forth, that is quite separate both from the ‘objective’ categorisations of the sociologically-minded and from the ‘subjective’ opinions of the participants.³⁵²

The social real *emerges* as the ethnographer investigates a social space in which all the actors – including the ethnographer - are engaged in a constant process of mutual interpretation and construal. In these interactions in the ‘economy of fantasies’, social actors encounter constraints, motivations, forces and obligations. It is through paying attention to these enduring patterns, and *abstracting* away from particular, positioned

³⁴⁹ Hastrup, ‘Social Anthropology’ 140.

³⁵⁰ On which see Hastrup: ‘The connections that the anthropologist makes are not so much backed by an experience of culture as by an experience of the contingency of the frames within which everybody plays his or her part.’ Hastrup, ‘Getting it Right’ 467.

³⁵¹ Hastrup, ‘Getting it Right’ 458.

³⁵² Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* 70–1. Jenkins concludes, ‘The life of the country church in Comberton is, therefore, an illustration of a social fact, being at the same time complex and intangible. The social fact, although obscure, is both more real and enduring than either the hard facts (which can be counted) or the recordable opinions which together form its temporary realisations, and to mistake either for that reality is frequently to join in at the level of and as a participant in the economy of fantasies.’ (70–1).

encounters that the ethnographer constructs a map of the social real.³⁵³ The social real, then, is a kind of *construction*. To claim that the social real is a construction, and not objective or empirically testable in a straightforward sense, is not to say that it is fictive. Nor is it to say that the social real is not experienced, or that its force as experienced is merely our imagination, or psychosomatic. The social real is real in the sense that we experience it; it is not real in the sense of having a stable, objective ontological status.³⁵⁴

c) *Anthropological knowledge*

When we say that the social real is constructed, or an abstraction, we are drawing attention to two things: how we come to know what we know, and what character this gives our knowledge. That is, asserting that the social real is emergent, abstract and constructed is a way of acknowledging the *participatory* character of our inquiry and the *temporary* and fashioned character of our knowledge. Yet pragmatic/relational anthropology is not simply saying that our descriptive language can be more or less adequate, and that an anthropological understanding is 'temporary' in the sense that it can always be improved. It goes further, by drawing attention to the fact that the 'how' of anthropological (and everyday) knowledge reaches out, as it were, into the 'what' of the object of study itself.³⁵⁵ Geertz maintained that discussions over the nature of anthropology were arguments over *mots*, not *choses* - arguments over the shape and adequacy of the conceptual

³⁵³ Jenkins writes, '...the 'real' persists far longer than events, personalities or interpretations, and exists at this obscure level: moral or social facts are situated in the constraints and compulsions experienced as humans make sense of themselves and others, in the constancies of mutual interpretation and the patterns of understanding.' Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* 12.

³⁵⁴ See Hastrup, 'The object has no fixed ontological status, be it as a culture, society, community – or, indeed, knowledge.' Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 458.

³⁵⁵ Hastrup quotes Hilary Putnam as saying that mind and language reach so deeply into reality that any idea of us mapping a reality independent of language is fatally compromised from the off. See Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology* 166.

categories through which we tackle, describe and ultimately define what we see.³⁵⁶

But for Hastrup, *mots* and *choses* cannot be separated, and ‘getting it right’ in anthropology depends on being able to see how words produce things. Hastrup talks about this link between the temporary character of anthropology’s object and anthropological knowledge in terms of *ontological dumping*.³⁵⁷

Anthropological knowledge is fashioned knowledge. Like everyday knowledge, it is constructed out of ‘that mixture of knowledge of the world, goals and ambitions, constraints and contingencies, imaginative “shots in the dark”, emotion and ignorance... which combine in the human experience.’³⁵⁸ It is, as Jenkins puts it, only a special case of the general condition of human knowledge.³⁵⁹ Anthropologists, like everyone else, depend on concepts and theories that simplify complex and varied experiences – concepts like ‘religion’, ‘culture’, ‘society’, ‘law’ and ‘economy’.³⁶⁰ Following Strathern, Hastrup calls such theories ‘persuasive fictions’.³⁶¹ This is not to mark them out as ideological or false, but to draw attention to their power as ‘naturalized illusions’.³⁶² Hastrup argues that concepts like speed, society and history

are but summaries of a vast variety of phenomena. Conversely, these phenomena can be said to find condensed expression in the words. These are reflections of the theoretical propensity to condense, simplify and tidy up what is in fact extensive, complex and disorderly.³⁶³

³⁵⁶ Geertz, *Available Light* 12.

³⁵⁷ ‘If relational knowledge is more implicit and ephemeral than object-knowledge, it may nevertheless transform into the latter with time, partly through the general process of objectification that goes along with classification and articulation (also known as ‘ontological dumping’), partly through institutional endorsement.’ See Hastrup, ‘Getting it Right’ 456.

³⁵⁸ Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 442–3. He is quoting R Jenkins, ‘Thinking and doing: towards a model of cognitive practice’ in *The Structure of Folk Models* ed. L Holy and M Stuchlik, (London: Academic Press, 1981) 93.

³⁵⁹ Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 445.

³⁶⁰ Kirsten Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context: A Discussion of Ontological Dumping,’ in *New Approaches to the Study of Religion: Volume 1 Regional, Critical and Historical Approaches*, ed. Peter Antes, et al. (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 2004) 253–70 (258).

³⁶¹ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 253. The term ‘persuasive fiction’ is Marilyn Strathern’s. See Strathern, ‘Out of Context’ 251–81.

³⁶² Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 253.

³⁶³ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 258.

Such theories and concepts are tidy summaries, or a sort of shorthand: they help us communicate about our experience, and help us interpret it, but the fit between theories and our experience is not exact.³⁶⁴

Some of these theories, ideas and viewpoints (like ‘culture’) become so useful and trusted that we deposit them in a bank of unquestioned knowledge, and use them without a great deal of thought. Hastrup calls this process of objectification ‘ontological dumping’ because the concepts we use in this way tend to develop a life of their own. Persuasive fictions like ‘society’ are *invented*, and then invested with ontological significance: they become new objects, new things in the world.³⁶⁵ Hastrup takes ‘society’ as an example of such a concept. Durkheim started off by drawing on the concept of ‘society’ as an analytical tool, a framework for understanding the connections between social phenomena. The tool proved so useful that it ceased to be simply an epistemological viewpoint, or a way of comprehending the world, and became a *thing*.³⁶⁶ Something *ontologically* new emerged – ‘society’, which came to be viewed as an objectively existent thing in the world. The word ‘society’ can then be used without further ado – we can read it back in time and talk about ‘Roman society’, assume that people know what we are referring to when we talk about ‘society today’, understand what Gallup polls tell us about what ‘society’

³⁶⁴ See also Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 258. According to Hastrup, the same goes for language: ‘the communicative quality of language hinges on a feature of generalization that often seems to belie the specificity of meaning and experience.’ (256). Although language is shared, we do not understand one another because we each mean or intend the same thing when we use words, or because there is some lowest common denominator of meaning on which we can act. We understand one another because we use a shared vocabulary to approximate our experience – this is what Wittgenstein is talking about when he gnomically says, ‘If a lion could speak, we would not understand him’. See Wittgenstein, *Investigations* 190. For Jenkins on the objectifying properties of language, see Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 447–8.

³⁶⁵ To make this point, Hastrup draws on Robert Paine’s distinction between the newness of discovery and the newness of invention. The newness of discovery means discovering a new thing in a class of known things – a new star among stars, or a new culture among cultures. The newness of invention involves something *ontologically* new – something new in the universe appears. See Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 257.

³⁶⁶ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 257–8.

thinks, and so on. Society is now ‘out there’, and an epistemological viewpoint has become an ontological entity.

This process of simplification and objectification has its benefits. It allows us to get on with normal life without doubting everything at once. It also allows for new knowledge, or new ways of knowing, to surface – an analytical viewpoint is there that was not there before. Hastrup does not consider ontological dumping to be a bad thing in itself. It *can* become a problem, however, ‘if we forget that the implied naturalization of phenomena is simply a consequence of a temporary mode of understanding’.³⁶⁷ The concept of ‘religion’ is a good example of the disadvantages of ontological dumping. Hastrup argues that ‘[i]f notions such as “society” or “religion” start off as attempts at understanding specific and very varied phenomena, they end up as “things” or ontological entities, that scholars have a hard time dissolving afterwards.’³⁶⁸

³⁶⁷ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 260.

³⁶⁸ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 259. Hastrup’s article points out the ways in which concepts like ‘religion’ and ‘context’ feed off each other. She argues that ‘the context authenticates the ethnographic detail, yet by itself it is a (largely unacknowledged) theoretical by-product’. (261). Our definitions of ‘religion’ simultaneously define what we will consider to be its context. Tim Jenkins, for example, surveys contemporary treatments of religion, which tend to view it from the outset as a phenomenon in decline: ‘In most contemporary accounts, “religion” is perceived as being confronted by its antithesis, “modernity”, and as being in a process of intellectual attenuation and institutional decline. At the same time, and in the same perspective, it tends to be ascribed the minor qualities of each and every classificatory opposition: it belongs to the private or personal as opposed to the public sphere, it is voluntary not obligatory, it concerns opinion not fact, it is emotive or affective, rather than cognitive, imprecise rather than exact, metaphorical not literal, and so on.’ See Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* 4. Hastrup quotes this passage in Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 256. Hastrup’s argument is that the dumped category ‘religion’ needs revisiting, and she stands behind Jenkins’ major contribution in his *Religion in English Everyday Life*: that religion itself can be read as context, if we re-understand it as ‘the expression of the human aspiration to flourish’ (Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* 13). Following Jenkins, Hastrup suggests, ‘We need not waste time by recapitulating definitions and more or less obsolete typologies of “religion”, before we can begin to discuss what goes on in the world. “Religion” may simply provide a relevant analytical context for studying certain actions, beliefs, or institutions that may or may not include all and sundry at times.’ (Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 265). Louis-Marie Chauvet has an interesting study of how different definitions of ‘religion’ affect theologians seeking to engage anthropology in his ‘When the Theologian Turns Anthropologist’ in ed. Sweeney et al, *Keeping Faith in Practice* 148–62.

Although the language of ‘persuasive fiction’ and ‘naturalised illusion’ might make realists nervous, Hastrup is not being radical about the possibility and nature of human knowledge. What she is doing is situating the ethnographer *in* the world again, rather than over against it, and pursuing the implications for ethnographic knowledge. Ethnographic knowledge turns out to be another species of human knowledge, using language to communicate, using theories to tidy up, using ontological dumping to get on with life. What Hastrup points out is the way in which these general human characteristics have particular impact on ethnography. Our ability as ethnographers depends on our ability to sit light to – or at least recognise – the ontologically dumped nature of the categories with which we work. Any chemist will be able to tell you that physical systems tend to progress towards increasing entropy – they become more and more disordered. Human knowledge and human language tend to go in the opposite direction. The key to ethnography is to work against the flow: to identify, examine and analyse all that goes unsaid, to question, break and reshape the analytic categories with which one works, to keep the reality one seeks to explain *alive* in one’s explanation. This brings us to looking at how pragmatic/relational anthropology thinks about how anthropologists ‘get it right’.

d) Getting it right

With such a view of the social real as an abstract construction, and the idea of society itself as a ‘persuasive fiction’, how are we to judge the accuracy of ethnographic accounts? With no external real to which we can appeal, are all ethnographic descriptions equal? Surely not – if we dismiss reference to the external real as a standard of proof, we can scarcely call all ethnographic representations equal on the

basis that they all *lack* that standard of proof.³⁶⁹ The question of how we judge ethnographies is closely bound up with the kind of knowledge we consider them to be. If we consider them to be objective accounts, we will judge them against reality. If we consider them to be horizontal generalisations about experience and knowledge, then we will judge them against conflicting accounts of experience. And if we consider anthropological knowledge relational and temporary? ‘The point of anthropology’, Hastrup writes, ‘is not to tell the world *as it is* (which would be practically impossible) but to interpret it and to suggest possible (theoretical) connections within it as perceived and inferred from being in touch with a world that cannot be taken for granted – unlike the home world.’³⁷⁰ If we consider anthropological knowledge to be interpretative, as well as (albeit complicatedly) descriptive, then the task of gauging the reliability of any given ethnographic inquiry is thrown back on two words in the above quotation: ‘in touch’.

Jenkins asserts the *moral* nature of ethnographic knowledge. It is ‘both ordering and revisable, intervening and reflecting, acting and comprehending’.³⁷¹ If anthropological knowledge has a moral character, then the task of judging ethnographies is an *ethical* one. The concept of the ethnographic real advanced here does not involve us in any new uncertainty about the truth of ethnographic discourse; rather, it recognises the uncertainty that strongly realist discourses unsuccessfully suppress.³⁷² On this view, how do we choose between competing anthropological accounts? We try to discern the allegorical levels on which the texts operate. We ask about rhetoric, textual practice, about the relationships between the facts identified,

³⁶⁹ Hastrup points this out in ‘Getting it Right’ 468–9.

³⁷⁰ Hastrup, ‘Getting it Right’ 468.

³⁷¹ Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 452.

³⁷² Geertz suggests that ‘the renunciation of the authority that comes from “views from nowhere”...is not a loss, it’s a gain...’ See Geertz, *Available Light* 137.

the categories brought and the conclusions reached. We ask about reliability, and question the ethnographer's place on a scale of rhetoric from 'foreshortening' to distorting. We ask about field experience and the relationships in which the anthropologist engaged. In short, we undertake many of the same inquiries as simple realism would – though perhaps with more of an eye to the literary character of ethnography, and with as much attention to the fieldwork practice of the ethnographer as their conclusions. The difference is that 'getting it right' is not conceived in terms of correspondence to an external real: 'The ethical demand is to 'get it right', not in any ontological sense, but in being true to the world under study and to the epistemological premises of anthropology.'³⁷³

'Being true to the world under study' – is this not just a platitude, a sort of temporary sticking plaster for anthropological anxiety about the reliability of one's conclusions and constructs? Given that any anthropologist could claim they were being true to the world under study, Hastrup's ethical principle seems to be weaker than Scout's honour. Can we not come up with anything stronger than 'being in touch' with a world and 'being true' to it? The answer is no, we cannot, and in fact anthropology should quite properly resist attempts to make this criterion for 'getting it right' any stronger than Hastrup makes it. For to make the criteria for anthropological judgement more certain would be to claim a stronger status than is warranted for anthropological knowledge itself. Anthropological knowledge, as we have seen, is temporary, incomplete, the product of particular actors with a mixture of motives. We have also seen that it can produce valid and useful knowledge without dressing up in the clothes of 'hard science'.

³⁷³ Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 469.

5. Ethnography and the real church

At the beginning of this chapter, I stated three aims. The first was to correct the simplistic view of ethnography that arises when ecclesiology and ethnography are treated as functional opposites within the same scheme – what I called the ‘thermostat’ problem. I suggested at the end of chapter two that the best way to unpick this problem would be to look at ethnography in detail and ask how it understood and related to its object of study. To this end, this chapter has gone through four different understandings of how ethnography understands and relates to its object of study, the social real. This investigation helped us to address the second aim of the chapter: to ask what kind of ‘real church’ ethnography could give ecclesiology. A third, background aim was to head off various problematic uses of ethnography by ecclesiologists. So far, we have gained a richer and more complex picture of ethnography, and I have argued for a particular understanding of how ethnography should think of and relate to its object of study. What we need to do now is summarise the ethnographic gains of the chapter, and ask what these mean for the ecclesiological exploration that follows.

a) Summary

I opened the chapter by looking at the Mead-Freeman controversy and briefly recapping the problems with a ‘hard science’ understanding of anthropology. We saw that a scientific understanding of anthropology is unable to take account of the degree to which the anthropologist’s subjectivity is involved both in the fieldwork process, and in the production of a final ethnographic account. We have already seen in the last chapter that concrete ecclesiologies’ social scientific descriptions of real churches

function on a number of allegorical levels. Just as Mead's description of Samoa speaks to extraneous disciplinary debates, ecclesiological descriptions of real churches are doing significant theological work. Ethnography cannot give ecclesiology an objective, simple account of the 'real church' on which to build, or with which to disrupt: ecclesiologies' use of ethnography is too bound up with theological concerns from the outset. We need a more reflexive and subtle understanding of ethnography.

We then looked at the rise of interpretative approaches to anthropology through looking at the work of Clifford Geertz. The turn to looking at shared meanings enabled anthropology to get beyond an impasse over the definition of 'culture', but the same emphasis meant interpretative approaches struggled to address questions of power, and tended to reproduce societies' blindness to minority views and experiences. Likewise, the turn to explaining cultures in their own terms was an abiding advantage, but the necessary assumption that the culture constituted a coherent and integrated whole risked over-attributing coherence or otherness to the social group under study. We saw in the two foregoing chapters that postliberal theologians, and some concrete ecclesiologists, find a Geertzian understanding of anthropology very congenial - it provides an attractive way of explicating Christian practices and beliefs in terms of their own internal integrity.³⁷⁴ Yet, just as Geertzian approaches can leave anthropologists leaning rather heavily on the assumptions of wholeness and coherence that they bring to the field, so corresponding ecclesiological uses can lean too heavily on the idea that the church is a distinguishable, holistic context.³⁷⁵ This means that such concrete ecclesiologies risk over-investing in

³⁷⁴ Mudge writes, 'What should ecclesiology as social theory look like methodologically?...[the] hermeneutical method is the most appropriate one.' See *Beloved Community* 5-7 (7).

³⁷⁵ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 42-6, 104-110. Tanner writes, 'Theology projects onto the object studied what its own procedures of investigation requires - a coherent whole. The method of study itself validates the conclusions of the theologian while disqualifying the people and practices it studies

distinctions between church and world that simply do not inhere, and making problematic assumptions about the degree to which Christianity constitutes a whole cultural context.³⁷⁶ This is, as we have seen, anthropologically unsustainable, and arguably theologically undesirable too.³⁷⁷ We need a way of approaching the ‘real church’ that does not leave us placing undue ethnographic and theological weight either on an unsustainable distinction between church and world, or on an unsustainable set of assumptions about the ‘wholeness’ of the Christian way of life.

We saw in postmodern approaches an attempt to hold onto the advantages of interpretative approaches, while addressing some of their shortcomings. This resulted in less emphasis on cultural wholes, and more emphasis on individual experience. We saw that postmodern approaches also took better account of the power dynamics of societies and the process of anthropological research itself. Concrete ecclesiologies that are more aware of the drawbacks of interpretative approaches to ethnography (especially with relation to the church) tend to draw on postmodern anthropology. While this enables them to avoid making assumptions about Christianity as a whole cultural context, it leaves them with a tendency towards methodological individualism. Such individualism does not work on an ethnographic level, where it simply reverses the problematic dynamic between whole and part, nor on a theological level, where (as we saw in the last chapter) it results in lowest common denominator ecclesiology. We also saw that concrete ecclesiologies’ determination

from posing a challenge to their conclusions. The theologian is only uncovering a force for coherence that is already a part of practice, but whatever this is is only apparent once the theologian points it out.’ (76)

³⁷⁶ For a critique of the idea that Christianity is a ‘whole way of life’, see Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 97–8.

³⁷⁷ Tanner argues in *Theories of Culture* that Christianity is defined by being beyond Greek and Jew, slave and free – its existence should not be predicated, then, on yet another social division (100). She vehemently rejects a focus on Christian social distinctiveness: ‘...everything depends on the maintenance of this special society; its superiority and distinctiveness are an overriding theological concern. Such Christian self-concern, alternating as it does between pride and defensiveness, is, if I might hazard a theological judgement, nothing short of idolatrous.’ (102).

not to tidy away minority experiences implicates them in one of postmodern anthropology's weaknesses – its tendency towards thinking of ethnographic accuracy in terms of how well it preserves the irreducible complexity of people's experience. This means that postmodern anthropologies, and the ecclesiologies that draw on them, lean towards 'horizontal', descriptive ethnography, rather than "vertical" generalizations about the processes by which meanings and practices become temporarily objectified in social practice, as knowledge or another kind of certainty.'³⁷⁸ We need a way of approaching the 'real church' that explains as well as describes, and that unpicks the problematic dynamic between whole and part, rather than slipping into methodological individualism.

Finally, we turned to exploring an approach at once difficult and promising – what I called pragmatic/relational anthropology. On this reckoning, the object of ethnographic inquiry (the social real with which it is concerned) is not a fixed ontological entity at all, but *emergent*. It emerges in the constant interplay between individual and community, as people exchange understandings, misconceptions and constructions in an 'economy of fantasies'.³⁷⁹ The anthropologist discerns this emergent reality by placing herself within the 'field of tension between the individual and the social'; she constructs an ethnographic account not by observing from the outside, but by piecing together particular knowledge from the inside.³⁸⁰ While this view complicated the task of arbitrating between ethnographies or assessing their reliability, we saw that it did so by taking seriously the way in which the subjectivity of the anthropologist and the informant is involved in the construction of

³⁷⁸ Hastrup, 'Getting it Right' 458.

³⁷⁹ Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* 59.

³⁸⁰ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 140.

ethnographic knowledge.³⁸¹ Like knowledge of everyday life, anthropological knowledge is temporary and partial, but nevertheless valuable.

Pragmatic/relational approaches make good sense of the way in which an anthropologist's subjectivity is integral to the production of anthropological knowledge. By drawing parallels between knowledge of everyday life and ethnographic knowledge, pragmatic/relational approaches are able to leave behind both scientific insistence on objectivity and postmodern insistence on subjectivity, and provide a reflexive account of the anthropologist's involvement. In contrast to both interpretative and postmodern approaches, a pragmatic/relational approach is also able to see wholes and parts (whether these are society/individual, history/biography etc.) as mutually constituting, rather than making one a side effect of the other.³⁸² This means pragmatic/relational approaches avoid assuming cultural wholes in advance, or atomising cultural wholes into individuals. Additionally, the idea of 'ontological dumping' allows the pragmatic/relational approach to establish a dialectical relationship between the categories brought to a social situation, and the reality that emerges through the anthropologist's investigation.

b) Theological cues

Clearly, the ethnographic conclusions of this chapter set a number of hares running, and raise significant questions about how ecclesiological ethnography might be done differently in the light of pragmatic/relational anthropology. There are plenty of methodological questions and issues to work through, both practically and

³⁸¹ As Hastrup puts it, 'We can never 'know' individuals as subjects; nor can we 'understand' them, as if they were truly objects; what we, as ethnographers, can know, is the space that they are prepared to share with us.' Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology* 156–7.

³⁸² Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 140.

conceptually, but I am not going to pursue them here. There are two reasons for this. First, promising methodological work is already being done, and there are already examples of astute and reflexive ethnographic studies of church communities.³⁸³ Second, practical methodological issues in ethnography are best worked through in a fieldwork context; there is no sense in my proposing a set of methodological changes without also showing how they work in practice, and there is no space for such an endeavour here. What I want to pursue instead are the *theological* implications of this chapter's ethnographic conclusions. We have seen that ethnography cannot deliver a real church that would give ecclesiologists a 'resting place for thought' - it cannot give us a once-and-for-all, objective, stable 'real' church on which to build theologically, or with which to disrupt.³⁸⁴ What, then, can it give us? What possibilities remain? What I want to suggest at the close of this chapter, and argue more fully in the next, is that the insights of pragmatic/relational anthropology can help us to develop a theologically richer understanding of our object of inquiry, the concrete church, and a renewed understanding of the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. It can do so by encouraging us to make the link between *how* we know, and *what* we know.

Pragmatic/relational anthropology is successful because it makes sense of how the subjectivity of the anthropologist is integral to the production of anthropological knowledge, and manages to balance a confident assertion of the value of anthropological knowledge with an honest appraisal of its limitations. It does this by placing the distinctive 'how' of anthropological knowledge – ethnographic fieldwork – at the heart of its understanding of nature of the social real, and at the heart of its

³⁸³ Among which I would include McClintock Fulkerson's, *Places of Redemption* and Jerome Baggett's, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁸⁴ The idea of a 'resting place for thought' is Rorty's; I borrow it from Hastrup's *Passage to Anthropology* 12.

account of the character of anthropological knowledge. Anthropology's contribution to knowledge is unique and valuable because of the way it is gained: by the anthropologist placing herself in the 'field of tension' between the individuals and the social, experiencing the very real force of social expectations, assumptions and tensions, and then constructing from these positioned encounters a theoretical account of the social real. Anthropology's object of inquiry, as we have seen, is understood as abstract, emergent and constructed. Hastrup writes,

One could simply say that the anthropological contribution to knowledge is based in ethnography, had this term not been debased by being imported either as a 'method' into other disciplines (often meaning little more than that the investigator actually talked to people), or by being seen merely as a way of presenting data (incorporating direct quotes from informants).³⁸⁵

What I want to argue at the end of this chapter, and in much more depth in the next, is that the key to developing a renewed understanding of the concrete church and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection will be to make the same connection between how we know and what we know. Our account of what the concrete church is needs to be governed by the ways in which we ordinarily know and talk about the church. Making this connection, and drawing out what it means for how we understand the concrete church and the purpose of ecclesiology, is the task of the next chapter.

c) Drawing similarities

At the close of this chapter, and by way of a bridge to the theological reflections of the chapter following, I want to draw out some similarities between pragmatic/relational ethnography and theology. The explorations of this chapter have suggested that, far from being functional opposites, theology and ethnography show marked similarities in the ways that they relate to, and are determined by, their objects of inquiry. Briefly

³⁸⁵ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 141.

exploring three of these similarities will establish some groundwork for the ecclesiological reflection of the next chapter.

i) Committed in the body

First, ethnography as we have explored it here is a profoundly relational and involving discipline. The ethnographer does not simply sacrifice subjectivity in order to gain the pearl of knowledge: the condition of knowing the reality of social life is engaging in it, experiencing its force.³⁸⁶ As Tim Jenkins puts it, ‘the anthropologist is committed in the body – almost unlike any other form of research – to an encounter with another form of social life.’³⁸⁷ The anthropologist describes social life not from some vantage point above it, but from within, by experiencing its forces, constraints and assumptions, and constructing from these particular encounters a picture of the social dynamics at work. The distinctive way that anthropological knowledge is gained is what characterises and constrains anthropological knowledge and language. The process of piecing an account of the social real together from particular places within it means that anthropologists have to constantly adjust and re-adjust their analytical and descriptive categories: ‘getting it right’ involves a kind of constant *adequatio mentis ad rem*.

Pragmatic/relational anthropology both resonates with and informs a certain understanding of the theological (and ecclesiological task).³⁸⁸ Theology, too, is

³⁸⁶ Hastrup, *Passage to Anthropology* 22.

³⁸⁷ Jenkins, ‘Fieldwork’ 451.

³⁸⁸ Louis-Marie Chauvet suggests the same parallel: ‘might not Christian theology, doubtless less in its content than its manner, have some service to render to anthropology, since it is constantly battling not only with interpretation but also and above all with the question of the implication of the confessing subject in an object that s/he is nevertheless seeking to treat with all the resources of critical reasoning? I leave this question open.’ See Chauvet, ‘When the Theologian Turns Anthropologist’ 160.

profoundly relational and involving. Theology may be faith seeking understanding: it is also, as Sebastian Moore puts it, the story of a soul in toils with its God.³⁸⁹ Moreover, theologians also find themselves describing the dynamics of God's ways with the world not from some vantage point outside creation, but from their place within those dynamics. This is what characterises and constrains theological language. It is human, partial, sinful, and needs to be constantly engaged in breaking and reshaping its descriptive categories in order to do justice to the living realities it seeks to address.

ii) Inadequacy of language

The second point of similarity I want to draw between ethnography and theology is between their language: ethnographic language as we have explored it here bears marked resemblance to theological language. As we explored above, one of the difficulties with ethnographic descriptions is their performative or creative character. This, together with the fact that ethnography inevitably describes social worlds from within, means that 'getting it right', or specifying how someone has got it wrong, is not straightforward: as we have seen, there is no objective, external real against which any given description can be measured.

With theological language, too, we also only know the inadequacy of our language from within it. Denys Turner's analogy of the way in which apophatic discourse functions could easily have been written about the ethnographic real as we have just surveyed it. He argues that the position of the theologian is

³⁸⁹ Dom Sebastian Moore, 'Four Steps Towards Making Sense of Theology' 87–8.

like that of the person who, when lost for a word, can only say what it is not, with absolutely no prospect of ever finding the right one, the word which will do full justice to the thought. She may very well be able to judge some candidates to be more adequate than others, but this cannot be because she knows the *mot juste* as a standard of comparison. We can only know the inadequacy of our language from within it.³⁹⁰

This same feature of ethnographic and theological language means that we cannot contest their claims by holding them up to an external reality, but by negating their claims with other allegories and other metaphors: we say Samoa is not Mead's by making it Freeman's; we say that God is not a rock because God is a bird.³⁹¹ I will argue in the next chapter, just as all language about God is 'tainted by ultimate failure', I will also suggest that ecclesiology needs to reacquire itself with the brokenness of its language about the church.³⁹²

iii) Living realities and breaking language

Lastly, ethnography and theology's language is characterised and constrained in the way we have just described because both deal with living realities that will always remain beyond their descriptive and analytical grasp. This means, as I have already said, that both involve a kind of constant *adequatio mentis ad rem*. It also means that theology's task bears marked similarities to the task of ethnography. We saw earlier that the ethnographic task involves constantly breaking and reshaping categories, examining all that goes unsaid and is taken for granted – not just in the social group being studied, but in the categories ethnography brings to it. The ethnographer is constantly working against the flow of language, which tends to generalise and

³⁹⁰ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 39.

³⁹¹ Turner, *Darkness of God* 37.

³⁹² See Turner, 'Apophaticism, Idolatry and the Claims of Reason,' in *Silence and the Word: Negative Theology and Incarnation* ed. Oliver Davies and Denys Turner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 11–34 (16).

‘ontologically dump’, sifting through sedimented meanings, assumptions and beliefs in order to arrive at an understanding of the social real. The challenge is to keep the living social realities of which one speaks alive in one’s description.

Theology, too, faces living realities which will always elude any final description and analysis. Given the fact that our theological knowledge is always in-the-middle, and our language always inadequate and fragmented, theology too must constantly break and reshape its categories. In chapter one, I quoted Robert Jenson’s characterisation of the question driving systematic theology: ‘What shall we say, that the gospel may again be spoken?’³⁹³ We know our tendency to repeat well-worn formulae, and part of the task of theology is to work against the flow of habit and ossification, returning over and over to Christian faith and practice in order to break and renew our language about God, so that the Gospel might be spoken again and new faith might appear.

³⁹³ ‘...In that we have heard and seen such-and-such discourse as gospel, what shall we now say and do that gospel may again be spoken?’ Jenson, *Systematic Theology Vol. I* 14.

Chapter Four: Ecclesiology on the Rough Ground

Introduction

The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course, not a *result of investigation*: it was a requirement.) The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. –We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!³⁹⁴

This thesis began with the question, ‘What is ecclesiology about?’ In the introduction, I parsed this into two questions, one about the *nature* of ecclesiology’s object of inquiry, and one about the *purpose* of ecclesiological reflection itself. Thus far, we have focussed on concrete ecclesiologies’ distinctive answers to these questions. We have seen how concrete ecclesiologies are engaged in reshaping the object of ecclesiological inquiry, by insisting that ecclesiology ought to focus its attention on the concrete, historical, sinful church of experience. We have also seen how concrete ecclesiologists are reshaping the purpose of ecclesiological reflection, by suggesting that it ought to be helpful to concrete communities in their struggle to live faithfully in their particular social and historical contexts.

The exploration thus far has suggested that, while concrete ecclesiologies’ basic convictions are sound, the way in which they tend to express them in contrast to modern ecclesiology causes problems. Treating theology and ethnography as functional opposites leaves us with a difficult understanding of ethnography and the kind of ‘real church’ it can give us, and a difficult understanding of theology as

³⁹⁴ Wittgenstein, *Investigations* §107. To save cluttering the footnotes, works by Wittgenstein are referred to by the customary abbreviated titles: *PI* (*Philosophical Investigations*); *Z* (*Zettel*); *BB* (*The Blue and Brown Books*) and *PR* (*Philosophical Remarks*).

inherently abstracting and idealising. In the last chapter, we explored some of the various ways in which ethnographers have understood their object of inquiry, the social real, and the nature of ethnographic knowledge. This helped to undermine the idea of theology and ethnography as functional opposites, and also helped us to develop a richer understanding of the kind of real church ethnography might be able to give us. I suggested that ethnography might help us to develop a more theologically mature understanding of the concrete church, and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. It could do so, I argued, by encouraging us to make the connection between *how* we know and *what* we know.

Concrete ecclesiologies have already begun making this connection between the *how* and the *what* of ecclesiological knowledge. They argue that, since we experience the church in particular, not the church in general, the principal object of ecclesiological inquiry should be the real, concrete church in its particular social and historical context. Their efforts to realise the significance of this point have, thus far, largely taken methodological rather than theological shape, as concrete ecclesiologists try to appropriate the methods and insights of ethnography in order to attend more closely to the concrete church. What I want to do in this chapter is advance the theological conversation a little further, by reflecting on what our ordinary ways of knowing and recognising church might mean for how we think about the object of ecclesiological inquiry, the church, and the purpose of theological reflection.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ There has been some theological reflection on the connection between the 'how' and the 'what' of knowing the church, but this has largely focussed on drawing out the significance of particular cases for how we understand church in general. Mary McClintock Fulkerson's uses her study of disabled people's participation in a small Methodist church, for example, to suggest that our understandings of church are often overly intellectual, and Christian Scharen uses his study of three churches in downtown Atlanta to make the point that faithfulness looks different in different contexts. These kinds of ecclesiological study, in which (as Geertz would put it) small facts are made to speak to larger realities, have the potential to raise many interesting and important questions about the nature of the church and the purpose of reflecting on it; here, though, I want to reflect in a more general way on the connection between 'how' and 'what' in ecclesiology.

a) *Wittgenstein*

The main conversation partner for this chapter will be the later work of Wittgenstein. Given the postliberal tendency to connect questionable uses of Wittgenstein with eyebrow-raising claims about the church, this might seem a surprising choice, but Wittgenstein's work has three helpful emphases for the discussion that follows. First, Wittgenstein's concern is to return our attention to the *rough ground* – to the details of linguistic practice in everyday life. Instead of understanding meaning as a sort of mental pointing-at-things, for example, Wittgenstein returns our attention to the ways in which we use words on a daily basis: going shopping, telling someone about a dream, following instructions and so on. This emphasis on everyday knowledge was something we picked up in chapter three, in looking at pragmatic/relational ethnography. There, we saw Jenkins and Hastrup draw parallels between everyday knowledge and the knowledge of fieldwork, and use the comparison to show how ethnographic knowledge is simultaneously valuable and limited. This chapter will draw on Wittgenstein to reinforce that emphasis on the 'rough ground' of everyday knowledge and, in answering questions about how we discern and define church, repeatedly draw attention to the everyday ways in which we encounter, know and talk about church.

Second, Wittgenstein's work is characterised by anti-essentialism. He is not interested in coming up with one overall theory of language, but with drawing attention to the many different ways in which we use words and understand them. Likewise, he is not interested in essentialist definitions of concepts like colours and games. Rather than trying to explain the concept 'game' by enumerating the basic properties shared

by all games, he prefers to understand the concept as a loose ‘family’, and explain it by giving examples. This anti-essentialism obviously resonates with concrete ecclesiologies’ conviction that ecclesiology should not become preoccupied with defining ‘essential churchness’.³⁹⁶ I will suggest in what follows that Wittgenstein’s anti-essentialism can help us to develop a more theologically mature account of the concrete church, and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.

Third, Wittgenstein’s work is characterised by explanatory asceticism. He is quite prepared to admit that explanations come to an end, that philosophy cannot (in fact should not) seek to explain everything and that, despite being so limited, philosophical reflection is nonetheless useful and necessary. He writes,

Here we come up against a remarkable and characteristic phenomenon in philosophical investigation: the difficulty—I might say—is not that of finding the solution but rather that of recognizing as the solution something that looks as if it were only a preliminary to it. “We have already said everything. –Not anything that follows from this, no, *this* itself is the solution!”

This is connected, I believe, with our wrongly expecting an explanation, whereas I believe the solution of the difficulty is a description, if we give it the right place in our considerations. If we dwell upon it, and do not try to get beyond it.

The difficulty is here: to stop.³⁹⁷

At the end of chapter two, we looked at one of the most promising theological attempts to connect how we know the church with what we know – Healy’s ‘A (Somewhat) Chastened Ecclesiology’. We saw there that his treatment of the church still tended towards a preoccupation with the church’s distinctiveness, and what I called ‘lowest common denominator’ ecclesiology. Drawing attention to Wittgenstein’s explanatory asceticism will help us to address these problems by encouraging concrete ecclesiologies to resist the urge to over-explain the church – to learn to *stop*.

³⁹⁶ Jenkins, *Church Faces Death* 80.

³⁹⁷ Z §314.

b) The path ahead

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to develop concrete ecclesiologies' accounts of the concrete church and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection on it. In the first part of the chapter, we will explore Wittgenstein's basic insights about the way language works, and the features of human life that make it work in this way. In the second part of the chapter, I will sharpen some of Wittgenstein's insights about meaning and language into an ecclesiological point.

1. Wittgenstein on meaning and language

a) Wittgenstein's critical targets

Before exploring Wittgenstein's account of meaning and understanding, it is important to set him in context by briefly describing the positions against which he is arguing in the *Investigations* and his later works more generally. Reading Wittgenstein against the background of his critical targets is important because of the kind of philosophical work he believes himself to be doing. That work is primarily critical: although Wittgenstein gives positive examples for how we should think about meaning, understanding and thinking, he proposes these in a fairly piecemeal fashion as ways of levering us *out* of problematic ways of thinking about these activities.³⁹⁸ While his work does have an idiosyncratic coherence and order to it, particularly in the better organised *Investigations* and *Blue and Brown Books*, he is not a systematic

³⁹⁸ He describes philosophy as a 'fight against the fascination which forms of expression exert upon us'. *BB* 27. See also similar comments on philosophy in *PI* §§115–33: Philosophy does not deal with a single problem and is not a single method – like therapy, it has different methods (*PI* §133).

philosopher.³⁹⁹ His work is characterised by the way in which it criss-crosses the same territory repeatedly, making proposals, working through particular examples, voicing and countering objections, and then changing track to pick up another example, or another train of thought entirely.⁴⁰⁰ Identifying Wittgenstein's targets helps to organise and explain what might otherwise seem like a motley collection of multi-voiced and disorganised arguments. It also helps to understand the *kind* of argument Wittgenstein is making, and the nature of his positive proposals: we should neither seek nor demand too much coherence and detail from his positive proposals; to do so would be to risk distorting him.⁴⁰¹ This will become important when I pick up some of Wittgenstein's positive proposals and explore them in an ecclesiological direction later on, as the constructive intent of my proposals will be similarly limited.

b) *The Augustinian picture*

Wittgenstein's first target is what I will refer to as the 'Augustinian picture' of language.⁴⁰² His *Philosophical Investigations* opens with a quotation from Augustine's *Confessions*, in which Augustine describes how he learned language as a child:

³⁹⁹ Baker and Hacker comment on some of the peculiarities of Wittgenstein's thought in G P Baker and P M S Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Understanding*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984) xv–xvi.

⁴⁰⁰ For the idea of criss-crossing the same ground repeatedly, see *PI* x. Kerr quotes F. R. Leavis complaining about Wittgenstein's propensity for voicing objections to his own arguments: 'Wittgenstein can take all the sides by himself; he answers before you've said it – you can't get in'. See Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 51.

⁴⁰¹ Baker and Hacker warn, 'the danger of separating Wittgenstein's account from the context of an explicit critique of the Augustinian picture is that one may replace the venerable idol of *Merkmale*-definition by the new idol of explanation by overlapping similarities among paradigms; one might think that here is the foundation for constructing a 'new theory of universals'.' See Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 185. See also their caution that Wittgenstein should not be thought of as advancing a *positive* theory that vagueness is an essential feature of language in Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 209.

⁴⁰² Following Baker and Hacker, who have a fuller discussion of the Augustinian picture in their Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 4–13. Wittgenstein uses this 'Augustinian' picture of language rather like a police photo-fit image: it is not a perfect photograph of the positions against which he argues, but it can be used to recognise and apprehend the three chief suspects – Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein himself in the *Tractatus*. Baker and Hacker suggest that, although the Augustinian picture does not square with the work of Frege, Russell or the *Tractatus* in all respects, it is nevertheless

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.⁴⁰³

From this fragment, Wittgenstein develops a picture of the understanding of language he is rejecting: 'the individual words in a language name objects - sentences are combinations of such names. In this picture of language, we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.'⁴⁰⁴

In the Augustinian picture, words have meaning because they *point to* things and *stand for* them.⁴⁰⁵ We can explain words through verbal definition (which explains one word in terms of another verbal expression) or through ostensive definition, in which we point to a thing.⁴⁰⁶ Ostensive definition is what forges the link between language and reality, and hence what fundamentally moors the meaningfulness of language.⁴⁰⁷ According to the Augustinian picture, then, all significant words are *names*, whose meanings, established through ostensive definition, remain the same regardless of the context in which the word is used.⁴⁰⁸ Not all of the things to which we refer with language can be physically pointed at, of course – we do not just name

important. It should be seen as 'the full flowering of certain propensities in philosophical thinking which are expressed in a variety of ways in accounts of meaning that are superficially quite different from each other...It is characteristic of a *Weltanschauung* that it has no owner or author; that it is the property of many individuals.' Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 13–14. They summarise the projects of Frege, Russell and the *Tractatus* in relation to the Augustinian picture of language in 15–20, 20–5 and 25–7 respectively.

⁴⁰³ *PI* §1.

⁴⁰⁴ *PI* §1.

⁴⁰⁵ *PI* §1, §10.

⁴⁰⁶ *BB* 1.

⁴⁰⁷ *PI* §15: '...naming something is like attaching a label to a thing.'

⁴⁰⁸ Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 4–5.

things like spiders and dogs, but also feelings, memories and mental states. In these cases, Wittgenstein writes, ‘Where our language suggests a body and there is none: there, we should like to say, is a *spirit*.’ – that is, we are pointing at some inner state or private experience.⁴⁰⁹ Without being linked to things in this way, words seem to be no more than dead, empty signs.⁴¹⁰

According to the Augustinian picture, then, names are the building blocks of language, and ostensive definition secures the foundations of language in reality. Given that ostensive definition anchors the meaningfulness of words in this way, it is important that a word’s reference to reality is unambiguous and exact, for a word has no meaning if nothing corresponds to it.⁴¹¹ It is therefore important to the Augustinian picture that ‘a name ought really to signify a simple’.⁴¹² That is, where we cannot explain a word by a verbal definition, in which we break it down into its constituent parts, we must be able to explain it by ostensive definition – by straightforward and unambiguous *pointing*.⁴¹³ Our explanations of words need to be

⁴⁰⁹ *PI* §36, §26.

⁴¹⁰ He writes ‘Frege’s idea could be expressed thus: the propositions of mathematics, if they were just complexes of dashes, would be dead and utterly uninteresting, whereas they obviously have a kind of life. And the same, of course, could be said of any proposition: Without a sense, or without the thought, a proposition would be an utterly dead and trivial thing. And further it seems clear that no adding of inorganic signs can make the proposition live. And the conclusion which one draws from this is that what must be added to the dead signs in order to make a live proposition is something immaterial, with properties different from all mere signs.’ *BB* 4.

⁴¹¹ *PI* §§40–2.

⁴¹² *PI* §39. *PI* §46 refers to Russell and the *Tractatus* in this connection. There is some debate as to the relationship between the *Investigations* and the *Tractatus*: Norman Malcolm seems to see the *Investigations* as a complete break with the *Tractatus*, and Baker and Hacker suggest that the *Investigations* completely destroys the distinction between simple and complex objects that underpinned the *Tractatus*. Kerr qualifies the picture: while Wittgenstein abandons the strict distinction between simple and complex objects, the search for simple objects in the *Tractatus* becomes the search for ‘forms of life’ in the *Investigations*. See Norman Malcolm, *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?* (London: Routledge, 1993) 38–9; Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 58–9; Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 64.

⁴¹³ See Wittgenstein’s example of the sentence ‘Excalibur has a sharp blade.’ *PI* §39. Baker and Hacker write, ‘It must be possible for an ostensive definition of an unanalysable word to be a complete explanation of the meaning of this word; for it to be final and unambiguous...If every ostensive definition were ambiguous or left open questions about the application of the defined word, it would require supplementation, and, unless this were itself further ostensive explanation, something other than ostensive definition would be necessary to secure the foundations of language.’ See Baker and

complete, because names must have a precise referent in order to have meaning. Defining a word or concept's meaning, in the Augustinian picture, means analysing the necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of the word.⁴¹⁴

The idea that language is founded on ostensive definition makes both meaning and understanding into *mental events*. To mean something is to sort of intentionally mentally *point* at it.⁴¹⁵ To understand something is to mentally associate a word with a thing; when two people understand one another, it is because they are both using the same words to refer to the same things. Wittgenstein writes,

if you are asked what is the relation between a name and the thing it names, you will be inclined to answer that the relation is a psychological one, and perhaps when you say this you think in particular of the mechanism of association. –We are tempted to think that the action of language consists of two parts; an inorganic part, the handling of signs, and an organic part, which we may call understanding these signs, meaning them, interpreting, thinking. These latter activities seem to take place in a queer kind of medium, the mind...⁴¹⁶

This idea of meaning and understanding as mental events results in the impression that, when we are thinking, 'meanings' are going through our minds in addition to the verbal expressions.⁴¹⁷

Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 5. This straightforward correlating of words with things means that, in the Augustinian picture, words and reality are isomorphic: see Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 6.

⁴¹⁴ Norman Malcolm also argues that definition-by-analysis is one of Wittgenstein's critical targets. When exploring the meanings of concepts like 'truth', 'beauty' and 'justice', philosophers have usually focussed, '...not on doings or happenings in the world, but as the *meaning* of these words. When you say that you 'know' this or that, what are you *saying*? Usually the concentration was on *truth-conditions*. When you say that you *know* that so-and-so, what are the necessary and sufficient conditions that must be satisfied in order for your assertion to be true. If a philosopher could spell out those conditions he would be giving a *definition* of the meaning of 'know'.' See Malcolm, *Wittgenstein* 25. Malcolm understands Wittgenstein to be returning philosophy's attention to 'what is given' (*PI* 192) - language-games and forms of life.

⁴¹⁵ 'Here meaning gets imagined as a kind of mental pointing, indicating.' *Z* §12. See also *PI* §33: 'Point to a piece of paper. –And now point to its shape–now to its colour–now to its number (that sounds queer). –How did you do it? –You will say that you 'meant' a different thing each time you pointed. And if I ask how that is done, you will say you concentrated your attention on the colour, the shape, etc.'.

⁴¹⁶ *BB* 3.

⁴¹⁷ *PI* §329.

This idea of meaning and understanding as mental events brings us to Wittgenstein's second critical target. As well as criticising the Augustinian picture of human language and how it works, Wittgenstein is also arguing against the view of the *human person* that underlies the Augustinian picture. Augustine's description of himself as a baby, Fergus Kerr writes,

registers a strong sense of how the self-transparent little soul looks out from its head, hears the adults making various noises, watches them (through its eyes) as they lumber towards some item of middle-sized dry goods, and then suddenly, and on its own, makes the connection, in its own mind, between the sounds the adults emit and the objects that they touch. Augustine pictures his infant self as already aware of its own identity (what is going on inside its own mind) and of what is going on around it (outside its mind), prior to and independently of its mastering the arts of speech.⁴¹⁸

We will see in what follows that, as well as targeting the Augustinian picture of language, Wittgenstein is also critiquing the idea of meaning and understanding as *mental* activities. While Wittgenstein is very much interested in what Augustine calls the 'natural language of all peoples', he sees physical gesture not just as the *expression* of a separate and private mental process, but as fundamental to how we communicate with one another.⁴¹⁹ Wittgenstein is trying to release philosophy from the grip of an understanding of the human person as a solitary, mental 'I' that dwells in, expresses itself through, and is finally limited by the physical body in which it has its seat.⁴²⁰

c) Wittgenstein's alternative

⁴¹⁸ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 56. See also *PI* §32.

⁴¹⁹ Hacker argues that the purpose of the private language arguments in *PI* §§243–315 'is to reveal the incoherence of a comprehensive picture of human nature, of the mind and the relation between behaviour and the mental, of self knowledge and knowledge of other people's experience, that has dominated philosophy since Descartes.' P M S Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind, Part I: Essays*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 1.

⁴²⁰ Wittgenstein, *BB* 69: 'We feel that in the cases in which "I" is used as subject, we don't use it because we recognize a particular person by his bodily characteristics; and this creates the illusion that we use this word to refer to something bodiless, which, however, has its seat in our body.' Wittgenstein shows that holding such a view results in the odd conclusion that what has pains and sees and thinks is of a mental nature only, because material objects cannot feel pain (*BB* 74).

Wittgenstein argues that the meaning of signs is not to be found in the thing to which they point. A sign's meaning is not something separate from it, which animates the sign and gives it life.⁴²¹ The meaning of words is their *use*, their function in social exchanges. Wittgenstein's purpose in many of the examples he uses in the *Investigations* is 'to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use'.⁴²² His first example, sending someone shopping, parodies the Augustinian picture of language:

I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word "five" and for each number he takes an apple out of the drawer. —It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.⁴²³

Wittgenstein's point in this laboured example is that this is *not* how people operate with words on an everyday basis. The example illustrates perfectly what happens when we bring words back to everyday use: we realise that 'the locus of meanings is not the epistemological solitude of the individual consciousness but the practical exchanges that constitute the public world which we inhabit together.'⁴²⁴ Wittgenstein's second example asks us to imagine a 'complete primitive language' used by a builder and his assistant, and the associated 'form of life' (a building project) in which this language is used.⁴²⁵ The builder calls out 'Slab!', 'Block!', 'Pillar!' and so on, and the assistant brings the objects he has learned to fetch when he hears these instructions.⁴²⁶ Wittgenstein's point is that if we want to know the *meaning* of the word 'Slab', we need to look at its function in the exchange of the two

⁴²¹ *PI* §432. When we think, there are not meanings going through our head at the same time as words: see *PI* §329, 186; *Z* §146.

⁴²² '[O]ne must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language which is its original home? —What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use.' *PI* §116.

⁴²³ *PI* §1; cf. *BB* 16–17.

⁴²⁴ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 58.

⁴²⁵ *PI* §§2–21; cf. *BB* 77–83 for a different version of the same example.

⁴²⁶ *PI* §2, for 'form of life' see §19.

builders.⁴²⁷ *Understanding* a word means grasping its currency in a social exchange – knowing what it is the word *does*.⁴²⁸ Meaning and understanding are not mental processes, but social capabilities.⁴²⁹

Throughout the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein seeks to bring our attention back to the contexts in which words are straightforwardly used and understood, in order to break the hold that the Augustinian picture has over us. To do so, he develops the ideas of ‘language-games’ (*Sprachspiele*) and their associated forms of life (*Lebensformen*).⁴³⁰ For Wittgenstein, to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life in which that language has meaning: ‘...the term “language–game” is meant to bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a life-form.’⁴³¹ The examples he gives of language-games are all small things, like requesting, thanking, cursing, greeting and praying.⁴³² Such activities, like comforting someone in pain, involve not just characteristic uses of language, but also characteristic actions and forms of behaviour.⁴³³ Like games of cards or football, we

⁴²⁷ Asking about the meaning of a word is like asking about the function of a piece in chess. *PI* §108.

⁴²⁸ ‘One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its *use* and learn from that,’ *PI* §340. For example, the difference between the order ‘Five slabs!’ and the report, ‘Five slabs’ is not to be found in what they *refer* to, but in their currency in a social exchange – what it is that they *do* for us. See *PI* §21. Wittgenstein suggests that words are instruments characterised by their use: *BB* 67.

⁴²⁹ To understand a rule is not to have a particular mental state of understanding, but to have mastery of a *technique*: understanding is ‘knowing how to go on’. See *PI* §§148–55; cf. *Z* §144 ‘How words are understood is not told by words alone.’ Baker and Hacker note, ‘Although behaviour manifesting understanding is not itself understanding, but evidence for it, what this is evidence for is an ability, not a state, i.e. not a persisting mental structure in an ethereal medium.’ Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 341.

⁴³⁰ In the *Blue and Brown Books*, Wittgenstein explains language-games as ‘the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words’, and says that the study of language-games is ‘the study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages.’ *BB* 52.

⁴³¹ *PI* §23.

⁴³² *PI* §23. Kerr notes, ‘To wonder whether such a vast and internally diverse phenomenon as religion or Catholicism would count [as a language game] seems superfluous.’ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 30.

⁴³³ In this respect, they resemble games, which also involve characteristic gestures, presuppose particular reactions, or take place in the context of particular activities. For presupposing particular reactions, see *PI* §142: ‘...if there were for instance no characteristic expression of pain, of fear, of joy; if rule became exception and exception rule; or if both became phenomena of roughly equal frequency – this would make our normal language-games lose their point. –The procedure of putting a lump of cheese on a balance and fixing their price by the turn of the scale would lose its point if it frequently

require training in order to ‘play’ these language-games correctly, according to the established, publicly-understood rules.⁴³⁴ While these rules do not provide for every eventuality (chess rules do not specify the size of chess pieces, for example), they are not thereby rendered incomplete or inadequate to the task, and they do allow for improvisation.⁴³⁵ Looking at three ways in which Wittgenstein uses examples of particular language-games to criticise the Augustinian picture of language will help us to explore Wittgenstein’s use of the concept further, and sketch out the elements of Wittgenstein’s thought that we will be putting to ecclesiological use in the second part of this chapter.

i) Following a rule

Wittgenstein uses the example of following a rule, or obeying an order, to undermine two ideas that emerge from the Augustinian picture of language: first, the idea that signs are self-interpreting and, second, the idea that the meaning of words is fixed by a sort of intentional mental *pointing* at a thing. He writes,

A rule stands there like a sign-post.—Does the sign-post leave no doubt open about the way I have to go? Does it shew which direction I am to take when I have passed it; whether along the road or the footpath or cross-country? But where is it said which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its finger or (e.g.) in the opposite one?⁴³⁶

A sign-post cannot intimate to me, in and of itself, the way I should go: I need to be part of a community in which a pointy bit of wood *means* something.⁴³⁷ Wittgenstein follows this with the example of the slab language-game transferred onto paper.

happened that such lumps suddenly grew or shrank for no obvious reason.’ See also *PI* 192–3 and cf. *Z* §351: “‘If humans were not in general agreed about the colours of things, if undetermined cases were not exceptional, then our concept of colour could not exist.’ No:—our concept *would* not exist.’ Human agreement does not *produce* the colour red, however: see *Z* §430–1.

⁴³⁴ Like chess playing, mastering a language is mastering a *technique*. See *PI* §150, §569; *BB* 67; *Z* §318 on training.

⁴³⁵ *PI* §83; *Z* §§115–20.

⁴³⁶ *PI* §85.

⁴³⁷ There is no ‘inner guiding’ we feel when we look at signs. See *PI* §§172–8.

Now, A trains B to match up in a table the written order for a building stone with a picture of the stone in the opposite column:

–One learns to look the picture up in the table by receiving a training, and part of this training consists perhaps in the pupil’s learning to pass with his finger horizontally from left to right; and so, as it were, to draw a series of horizontal lines on the table.⁴³⁸

Wittgenstein’s point is that the joining-up of words and things through ostensive definition is itself a socially-embedded practice that requires training.⁴³⁹ Returning to the rule-following example later on, Wittgenstein gives the example of a pupil who is asked to write down a ‘series of the form 0, n, 2n, 3n, etc. at an order of the form “+n”; so at the order “+1” he writes down the series of natural numbers.’⁴⁴⁰ When the pupil gets to 1000, having correctly followed the rule thus far, we then ask him to start adding 2. He writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012. ‘We say to him: “Look what you’ve done!” –He doesn’t understand. We say: “You were meant to add *two*: look how you began the series!” –He answers: “Yes, isn’t it right? I thought that was how I was *meant* to do it.” Following rules and repeated patterns of action is not a matter of my private intentions, but a matter of abiding by a socially established practice of rule following.⁴⁴¹ All these examples reinforce Wittgenstein’s point that using signs is a *social skill*, a set of abilities that we acquire by training. Understanding signs, rules and orders is not a mental state, but a practical *ability* to carry on in the same way.⁴⁴² By repeatedly focussing our attention on the ordinary uses of language in the small contexts of language-games, Wittgenstein shows that the Augustinian picture, even as

⁴³⁸ *PI* §86.

⁴³⁹ ‘We may say: only someone who already knows how to do something with it can significantly ask a name.’ *PI* §31.

⁴⁴⁰ *PI* §186.

⁴⁴¹ ‘I cannot describe how (in general) to employ rules, except by *teaching* you, *training* you to employ rules.’ *Z* §318.

⁴⁴² If we know how to use a rule, asks Wittgenstein, ‘...what does this knowledge consist in? Let me ask: *When* do you know that application? Always? day and night? or only when you are actually thinking of the rule?’ *PI* §148. He adds, ‘The grammar of the word “knows” is evidently closely related to that of “can”, “is able to”. But also closely related to that of “understands”. (‘Mastery’ of a technique.)’ *PI* §150; cf. *Z* §303–6.

it attempts to find the simple foundations of language, ends up with an overcomplicated and confusing account of how we communicate on an everyday basis.

ii) Exact reference and family resemblance

In the Augustinian picture, all words are basically names, all explanations ostensive definitions, and all sentences descriptions: one theory accounts for the meaningfulness of language in all the varied contexts in which language is employed, and in all the tasks for which language is employed.⁴⁴³ Ostensive definition is what moors the meaningfulness of language. To explain what a word or concept *means*, then, I need to know what it is referring to. If I am to use a word accurately (for example ‘red’), then I must know the conditions that have to inhere for my use of the word to be true (the thing to which I am pointing must have the property of ‘redness’). In order for language to make sense, each time I use the word ‘red’, I need to be intentionally *pointing* at the same property – I cannot point at a summer sky and meaningfully say, ‘Look how red it is!’ This means that, in the Augustinian picture, ‘the search for definitions is the search for those ingredients of everything falling under a concept that makes things fall under this concept.’⁴⁴⁴

In order to undermine both the idea of an overall theory of language and the understanding of definition as analysis, Wittgenstein develops the idea of a ‘family

⁴⁴³ Wittgenstein comments in *PI* §13, ‘When we say: “Every word in language signifies something” we have so far said *nothing whatever*; unless we have explained exactly *what* distinction we wish to make.’

⁴⁴⁴ Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 187.

resemblance' concept, by drawing an analogy between language in general and games in general.⁴⁴⁵ First, he voices an objection to his language-games approach:

"You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games, but have nowhere said what the essence of a language game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions* and of language."⁴⁴⁶

Wittgenstein then admits the charge: he is not going to produce 'something common to all that we call language'.⁴⁴⁷ Instead, he argues that 'these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, –but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways.' It is by virtue of these relationships, Wittgenstein argues, that we call all these different language-games, 'language'. He then draws an analogy between language and games. Games come in all shapes and sizes: 'board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on.'⁴⁴⁸ There is no common property shared by all these games that makes them share the name 'game': '...if you look at them, you will see not something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that...a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.'⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁵ It is important to note that Wittgenstein's use of the concept of family resemblances is *negative*: 'it is used to criticize the dogma that every general term *must* be applied on the basis of properties common to everything that falls under it...the danger of separating Wittgenstein's account from the context of an explicit account of the Augustinian picture is that one may replace the venerable idol of *Merkmal*-definition by the new idol of explanation by overlapping similarities among paradigms; one might think that here is the foundation for constructing a 'new theory of universals'.' See Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 185. They understand Wittgenstein's argument in *PI* §§66–85 to be '...that we know of no properties common to all games; that we do not explain 'game' by enumerating *Merkmale* of games; and that even if we were to discover a property common to all games, it would not reveal part of our concept of game because it would not belong to our (present) practice of explaining 'game'.' (193).

⁴⁴⁶ *PI* §65.

⁴⁴⁷ *PI* §65. See his comments on our 'craving for generality' in *BB* 17–19.

⁴⁴⁸ *PI* §66.

⁴⁴⁹ *PI* §66. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that "'There is something common to all these constructions – namely the disjunction of all their common properties.'" –I should reply: Now you are only playing with words. One might as well say: "Something runs through the whole thread—namely the continuous overlapping of these fibres.' See *PI* §67; cf. *Z* §26.

When we pay attention to how we use and explain the word ‘game’ on an everyday basis, we notice two things. First, we can see that we do not *apply* the word by looking at a given activity and then mentally pulling out a chart listing the common properties of games, and seeing if the activity we are watching corresponds to the mental chart. As Wittgenstein points out, when we look at all the varied activities we call games, we can see that the concept has unity not because all games have common properties, but because they are held together by similarities that crop up and disappear.⁴⁵⁰ Second, we can see that we do not explain the concept ‘game’ by citing the common features shared by all games, but by giving examples and adding, “‘This *and similar things* are called ‘games’”.⁴⁵¹ ‘Games’ is a blurred concept, but nonetheless useful.⁴⁵² Although it does not have precision or sharp boundaries, we can and do use the concept ‘games’ intelligibly and without difficulty.⁴⁵³ We might draw a sharp boundary around the concept, but this boundary would have nothing to do with our ordinary use of the word ‘game’.⁴⁵⁴ By drawing our attention back to how we use simple words like ‘game’, Wittgenstein is undermining the idea that words must have exact references in order to have meaning, and the idea that explaining a concept-word means *defining* it.⁴⁵⁵ By drawing an analogy between

⁴⁵⁰ ‘–Are they all ‘amusing’? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning or losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball-games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.’ *PI* §66.

⁴⁵¹ *PI* §69. Remarks follow in *PI* §§73–4 about the role of samples. This is discussed extensively in Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 174–83.

⁴⁵² *PI* §71. See also his comments on heaps of sand in *Z* §392.

⁴⁵³ *PI* §70–1. He writes, ‘...we can draw a boundary – for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept useable? Not at all! (Except for that special purpose.) No more than it took the definition: 1 pace = 75cm. to make the measure of length ‘one pace’ usable.’ *PI* §69.

⁴⁵⁴ *PI* §76; *BB* 17.

⁴⁵⁵ Wittgenstein’s discussion of family resemblance concepts is negative: ‘...it is to criticize the dogma that every general term *must* be applied on the basis of properties common to everything that falls under it.’ See Baker, and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 185. Baker and Hacker consider

language as a whole and games in general, Wittgenstein also draws our attention back to the myriad different ways and multiple different contexts in which language is used, showing that the Augustinian picture's overall theory of meaning inevitably (and unhelpfully) flattens out the differences, and thereby causes significant philosophical confusion.⁴⁵⁶

iii) Inner and outer

Not everything that we want to talk about using language is, as Fergus Kerr's phrase has it, 'middle sized dry goods'; we also need talk about things like thoughts, sensations, mental states and memories.⁴⁵⁷ In the Augustinian picture of language, we name these in the same ways as we name physical things like sheep or tea-towels, by positing an inner object (a thought, sensation or feeling), and then verbally pointing at it.⁴⁵⁸ Wittgenstein attacks this idea and the picture that accompanies it, of a private, mental 'inner' self in which sensations are felt and meanings and understandings are invisibly registered, and a public, bodily 'outer' self through which we express (or behind which we conceal) the goings-on of our inner life.⁴⁵⁹ He does so, again, by

Wittgenstein's argument in *PI* §§66–83 to be a systematic argument intended to destroy the idea of definition as analysis. See Baker, and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 197, and their comments on Wittgenstein's use of explanation in contrast to definition (*Erklärung*), 30.

⁴⁵⁶ 'It is interesting', Wittgenstein writes, 'to compare the multiplicity of tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said about the structure of language.' *PI* §23. In *PI* §24 he warns 'If you do not keep the multiplicity of language-games in view you will perhaps be inclined to ask questions like: "What is a question?" –Is it the statement that I do not know such-and-such, or the statement that I wish the other person would tell me...? Or is it the description of my mental state of uncertainty?' Baker and Hacker argue that '...Wittgenstein's strategy of focussing upon the uses of *sentences* undermines philosophical theories erected to *explain* how we can, mysteriously, do many of the mundane things we do with language. It explains away the mystery by clarifying the grammatical articulations that give rise to the impression of mystery.' See Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 79.

⁴⁵⁷ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 56.

⁴⁵⁸ Of the phrase 'I imagined him', Wittgenstein writes, '...every such use of language is remarkable, peculiar, if one is adjusted only to consider the description of physical objects.' *Z* §40.

⁴⁵⁹ What Fergus Kerr calls, following J M Cameron, the idea of human beings' fundamental 'epistemological solitude'. See Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 44. Kerr also makes the connection between these two ideas: 'Perhaps it is only if we are already strongly tempted to treat the self as a

bringing our attention back to everyday experience and language use – this time, by discussing the example of feeling and expressing pain.

Wittgenstein's discussion of pain shows the extent to which the Augustinian picture of language holds us captive, affecting not just what we think about language, but what we think about the nature of human beings.⁴⁶⁰ If I understand language to be founded on the practice of observing and naming physical objects, then I am likely to think of describing pain in terms of observing and pointing to an inner sensation, the pain. This pain, like all my inner thoughts, feelings, memories and so on, is private: nobody else knows I am in pain unless I choose to tell them so, just as nobody else knows what I am thinking until I tell them. The sensations, thoughts and emotions of others are private in the same way, and so I can only *infer* from their behaviour what they are feeling or thinking – they could, after all, be feigning pain, or happiness to see me. This picture of the human person is a familiar one because it calls to mind Augustine as an infant:

Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already *think*, only not yet speak. And “think” would mean here something like “talk to itself”.⁴⁶¹

Prior to, and separately from, any engagement in social life, it seems I can name my own feelings, thoughts and sensations ‘to myself’.

solitary intellect locked within a space that is inaccessible to anyone else that language looks intuitively like a system of referring to things.’ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 57.

⁴⁶⁰ Hacker unpacks the position against which Wittgenstein is arguing in Hacker, *Meaning and Mind* 8–12.

⁴⁶¹ *PI* §32; cf. *PI* §257.

Wittgenstein critiques this picture of language in characteristic manner by pushing it to its unnatural conclusions, and letting it fall apart as we watch.⁴⁶² He asks us to imagine a language ‘in which a person could write down or give vocal expression to his inner experiences – his feelings, moods and the rest’, for his own private use. ‘The individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person cannot understand the language.’⁴⁶³ This should be possible if it is true that we refer to sensations in the same way that we refer to physical objects, by forging a mental association between word and thing and then using it: we ought to be able to have a sensation, name it something (‘S’), and then use this to refer to the sensation subsequently – whether or not other people know what we mean.⁴⁶⁴ Wittgenstein shows that this idea of referring to an inner object is redundant. He writes,

Why can’t my right hand give my left hand money? –My right hand can put it into my left hand. My right hand can write a deed of gift and my left hand a receipt. –But the further practical consequences would not be those of a gift. When the left hand has taken the money from the right, etc., we shall ask: “Well, and what of it?” And the same could be asked if a person had given himself a private definition of a word; I mean, if he has said the word to himself and at the same time has directed his attention to a sensation.⁴⁶⁵

This example forms part of a larger and much more complex series of arguments, which we will not explore here, except to note that one of the purposes of these arguments is to ‘retrieve the natural expressiveness of the human body’, and the degree to which our everyday communication depends on this feature of human

⁴⁶² *PI* §464 ‘My aim is to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense.’

⁴⁶³ *PI* §243.

⁴⁶⁴ *PI* §258.

⁴⁶⁵ *PI* §268. See also *PI* §279: ‘Imagine someone saying: “But I know how tall I am!” and laying his hand on top of his head to prove it.’ D Z Phillips cites another example of Wittgenstein going on a walk with Norman Malcolm and ‘giving’ him the trees they passed, on the condition that he did not cut them down or do anything to them, nor prevent their previous owners from doing anything to them – with those reservations, the trees were *his*. See ‘Religion in Wittgenstein’s Mirror’ in Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* 237–54 (252).

life.⁴⁶⁶ Against the idea that we are ‘a crowd of hobbled angels, each isolated ‘behind the wall of the body’, like a hermit in a moated grange’, Wittgenstein wants to show that we *do* understand one another quite immediately and unreflectively.⁴⁶⁷ If we see someone else in pain, we do not ‘guess’ or ‘infer’ that they are in pain – we simply respond to them.⁴⁶⁸ Likewise, the statement that our own sensations are private is like the statement ‘One plays patience by oneself’ – it is usually perfectly obvious to others what is going on.⁴⁶⁹ In the face of objections that others might be feigning pain, or might even be automata merely *acting* like humans, Wittgenstein points out that a complex communicative act like ‘simulating pain’ depends on a whole series of simpler acts in which pain-expressions are usually (and unthinkingly) trusted.⁴⁷⁰ Wittgenstein’s intent here is to prise us out of thinking that we are first and foremost *alone*, a mental self trapped within the body, and show that we are first and foremost social and bodily – we communicate and understand on an intuitive level.

iv) Wittgenstein’s full stop

Through carefully bringing our language back from the slippery ground of metaphysical confusion to the rough ground of everyday life, Wittgenstein shows that the Augustinian picture is tortuously overcomplicated, positing ghostly mental objects and occult mental processes when our experience is that everyday communication is, if not as theoretically tidy, much more straightforward. Wittgenstein’s concern is always to bring our attention back to what he calls ‘the given’ – forms of life.⁴⁷¹ It is

⁴⁶⁶ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 89.

⁴⁶⁷ Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 80.

⁴⁶⁸ *PI* §287, §303, §310. See also *PI* 152: ‘My attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he has a soul.’

⁴⁶⁹ *PI* §248.

⁴⁷⁰ A dog cannot simulate pain: *PI* §250.

⁴⁷¹ *PI* 192.

by describing these forms of life, and the language-games that accompany them, that philosophy can bring clarification to our thinking.⁴⁷² Philosophy's task is description, not explanation: it 'simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything'.⁴⁷³ Wittgenstein's emphasis on the descriptive nature of philosophy, and on language-games as simply *given* and beyond explanation, have led to over-enthusiastic theological appeals to the way language-games act as a 'full stop' in Wittgenstein's work, and corresponding criticisms of 'Wittgensteinian fideism'.⁴⁷⁴ But, as Peter Winch points out in his comments on Malcolm's *Wittgenstein: A Religious Point of View?*, Wittgenstein is not saying that some things are simply and inherently beyond explanation:

Spinoza thought that because explanations come to an end there must be something which has no further explanation, a *causa sui*. But Wittgenstein's point is not at all like that at all – it is a *criticism* of such an outlook. He does not think that explanations come to an end with something that is intrinsically beyond explanation. They come to an end for a variety of quite contingent and pragmatic reasons, perhaps, because of a practical need for action, perhaps because the puzzlement which originally prompted the search for explanation has evaporated (for one reason or another.)⁴⁷⁵

In the next part of the chapter I will pick up on the themes of Wittgenstein's thought we have explored here: on the negative side, his distrust of overall theories and his eschewal of definition-as-analysis and, on the positive side, his use of family resemblance concepts and explanation-by-example, and his emphasis on intuitive

⁴⁷² *PI* §125.

⁴⁷³ *PI* §126. See also *PI* §124: 'Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.'

⁴⁷⁴ Norman Malcolm suggests that 'Wittgenstein regarded the language-games, and their associated forms of life, as beyond explanation...a language-game itself rests on no grounds that explain or justify it, that show it to be reasonable or unreasonable. It can only be observed and described.' (77–8) He argues that Wittgenstein wants explanations to come to an end with the existence of language games (82). Application of this idea by theologians (and Malcolm himself) have been attacked for 'fideism' – for making language-games autonomous, and beyond justification or criticism: see Kai Nielsen, 'Wittgensteinian Fideism,' *Philosophy* 42 (1967): 191–209. Phillips argues that both such interpretations of Wittgenstein 'do not follow from a proper reading of Wittgenstein's remarks, and take us away from the central questions Wittgenstein was addressing. Phillips' 'Wittgenstein's Full Stop' in Phillips, *Wittgenstein and Religion* 79–102, and 'From Coffee to Carmelites', *ibid.* 131–52 are an excellent and careful guide to Wittgenstein's idea of things being 'beyond explanation.'

⁴⁷⁵ Peter Winch, 'Discussion of Malcolm's Essay' in Malcolm, *Wittgenstein* 95–135 (104).

behaviour. Exploring some of the ecclesiological implications of these concepts will help us to develop concrete ecclesiologies' understandings of the nature of the concrete church, and the purpose of ecclesiological inquiry.

2. The meaning of 'church'

We have already seen in chapter one that concrete ecclesiologies' theological and methodological instincts owe a good deal to Wittgenstein. Just as Wittgenstein wanted to return philosophy to the 'rough ground' of particular language-games, concrete ecclesiologies seek to draw attention back to the multiple different ways in which church is understood and concretely lived. Concrete ecclesiologies' lack of interest in 'essential churchness' is also quite Wittgensteinian: they suggest that we come to understand what 'church' means, not by describing abstract *Merkmale* of church in general, but by looking at particular forms of ecclesial life. We have also seen that concrete ecclesiologies' Wittgensteinian instincts are largely worked out in methodological rather than theological mode: while they have applied themselves with enthusiasm to social-scientific study of particular churches, they have yet to engage in much reflection on the theological implications of their method. My purpose in the second part of this chapter is to advance concrete ecclesiologies' theological reflection a little further by (without pushing Wittgenstein too far), sharpening some of his insights to an ecclesiological point.

a) The difficulty is here: to stop

Back in chapter two, we took a close look at Healy's paper 'A (Somewhat) Chastened Ecclesiology'. We saw Healy critique Rowan Williams' rather Wittgensteinian

suggestion that we can discover the meaning of the word ‘God’ by looking at the speech and practice of ‘this community’, the church.⁴⁷⁶ Healy argues that ‘this community’ is not easily discernible: he argues that ethnographic studies show that church communities differ extensively from one another in their life and language, and also that individual congregations exhibit considerable internal pluralism in belief and practice. While there may be some basic shared characteristics, ‘the ethnographic view undermines the notion that they constitute the church as a ‘community’ or moral person in a sufficiently rich and consistent way to work as a principle for theological or ecclesiological method.’⁴⁷⁷ Ethnography cannot deliver the concrete commonalities in belief and practice that would enable a straightforward appeal to ‘this community’. Healy’s subsequent suggestion for how ecclesiology should proceed is also Wittgensteinian in spirit. He returns our attention to the details of individual practice, and to the complex ways in which Christians ‘pick and choose’ their beliefs and practices from the resources of church and world, and he refuses to tidy up this complexity into a general account of a distinctive Christian way of life. The approach is very promising yet, rather oddly, his account still ends up focussed on commonalities. First, he builds his account on the only concrete commonality he thinks ethnography can give us – individuals. Second, his account is still dominated by the need to define the distinctive commonality that defines the church – its mediating function. Although the direction of his thought is Wittgensteinian and anti-essentialist, he still ends up trying to identify ‘those ingredients of everything falling under a concept that makes things fall under this concept.’⁴⁷⁸ He ends up

⁴⁷⁶ Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 1.

⁴⁷⁷ Healy, ‘Chastened Ecclesiology’ 5.

⁴⁷⁸ Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 197. Some ecclesologists who focus in somewhat Wittgensteinian fashion on the practices of the church also concentrate their efforts, in rather less Wittgensteinian fashion, on defining the practices that make the church. See, for example, Reinhard Hütter, *Bound to be Free: Evangelical Catholic Engagements in Ecclesiology, Ethics, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 2004) 34–7.

sifting through the details of individual Christians' practice in order to find some account of what makes the church distinctive. His focus may be on the theological distinctiveness of the church, rather than its empirical distinctiveness, but Healy is still trying to establish what makes the church distinctively the church.⁴⁷⁹ His suggestion that concrete ecclesiologies should turn to the ordinary, complex and plural ways in which church is lived is a good one: the difficulty, as Wittgenstein observes, is to *stop* there, and to resist the urge to start distilling from these multiple different examples some kind of essential church.

The instinct that ecclesiology ought to somehow *define* the church is not unique to Healy. A good deal of ecclesiological energy is expended on trying to define the church, whether that means discussing its theological marks, discussing what 'makes' the church (mission, eucharist etc.), or trying to define the basic characteristics of its social appearance.⁴⁸⁰ Such efforts to establish a *Merkmal* definition of the church can be good and helpful: they may help us to negotiate pastoral situations where we need to be clear about what is church and what is not, and they can also help us to explore different theological facets of the church's life.⁴⁸¹ I want to suggest in what follows, though, that it is possible to develop an alternative understanding of ecclesiology's task, and an alternative approach to exploring ecclesiology's object. The key, as I

⁴⁷⁹ Healy argues that the theological distinctiveness of the church is established by God's call, and not our response to that call. Perhaps this is another case of the hands being the hands of Wittgenstein, but the voice being the voice of Karl Barth!

⁴⁸⁰ Miroslav Volf, for example, frames his constructive ecclesiological work in *After Our Likeness* as follows: 'Exploring the question of ecclesiality means exploring what makes the church the church. On the one hand, this represents a restricted point of inquiry, since it overlooks much of the rich life and multifaceted mission of the church; our interest is directed not toward how the church *ought* to live in the world according to God's will nor how it *can* live successfully in the power of the Spirit, but rather toward the *sine qua non* of what it means for the church to call itself a church in the first place. Ecclesiality involves that which is indispensable.' See Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans, 1998) 127.

⁴⁸¹ Although Healy suggests that ecclesiology should abandon the search for a 'supermodel' – one model of the church's essence, from which a complete systematic normative description of the church is deduced – he does suggest models can be 'used to discover and explore imaginatively the many facets of the Christian church'. See Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 35–6.

noted earlier, will be joining up *how* we know the church, with an account of *what* we know. We will begin by returning our attention to the rough ground – to the ordinary ways in which we talk about and recognise church. From there, I will look at what it might mean to think of the church as an analogical, or family resemblance concept, and reflect theologically on the significance of our ordinary practice of recognising the church. I will then draw out what these proposals might mean for how we understand the purpose of ecclesiological reflection: as searching for, rather than defining, the church.

a) The church as an analogical concept

If I instructed you to name all the churches you could think of that lie within a one-mile radius of your home or place of work, and then asked you how you had done this, I would be fairly confident that you had not gone mentally door-to-door with a template of what a church should concretely look like, in terms of its beliefs and practices. One or two instances (a Quaker meeting house, for example) might have given you pause for thought, and you might *then* have begun to consider whether that community was a church. That exception, however, would serve to show that you usually used the word ‘church’ fairly unreflectingly, that you accepted various different examples of ‘church’, and that your knowing how to use the word did not depend on having an exact mental template by which your local churches could be recognised and named as such. Sometimes, of course, a more sharply-bounded concept of church would be useful, and we might draw one up specifically for the purpose of criticising a church community (by telling them they ought to look after the poor in their own community, for example) or making clear that a group that claimed to be a church (for example Scientologists) was at least not a Christian one.

But, again, this would serve to underline the general rule that such sharp boundaries are not part of our ordinary practice of recognising and naming churches.

The ordinary ways in which we talk about and recognise churches suggests that we use 'church' as a *family resemblance* concept. We use the concept 'church' in a similar way to 'love' (or 'game'). If someone asked us the meaning of the concept 'love', we would probably explain it by giving examples, which might be ordinary, romantic, heroic, selfless or tragic. We accept that love can take very different forms, from Tristan and Iseult to changing a baby's nappy, and we can and do use the word 'love' correctly (and analogically) in all these cases. We do not mentally carry around a list of love's distinguishing characteristics, nor do we use our off-the-cuff examples of love as mental templates.⁴⁸² Moreover, attempting to define 'love' apart from specific examples of this kind would result in a definition that was rather bloodless and general, and conveyed little of love's character. If we tried to define 'love' in a general way, love's concreteness, which is what *makes* it love, would be lost, and the definition would be less than helpful on the rough ground of everyday experience. I want to suggest that our ordinary way of explaining church follows the same pattern, and that this should alert us to an important theological point: that church is, quite properly, an analogical concept. If we were asked to explain what church was, we could point to hundreds of quite different examples, from the early to the postmodern, the local to the furthest flung, the familiar to the extraordinary. All these examples of church would be different, but we would use the word 'church' to refer to all of them, and would recognise that the church's faithfulness looks different in different times and places. I suggest that we need to pay more *theological* attention to

⁴⁸² 'Someone says to me "Shew the children a game." I teach them gaming with dice, and the other says "That sort of game isn't what I meant." Must the exclusion of the game of dice have come before his mind when he have me the order?' *PI* 28.

how we ordinarily use the concept 'church' in this way. We will begin by looking at one theologian's attempt to think about the church as an *analogical* concept.

i) Analogical imagination

T. Howland Sanks argues that the church is, and always has been, quite properly an analogical concept.⁴⁸³ He discusses this claim by looking at three recent issues in Roman Catholic ecclesiology that he suggests would benefit from 'analogical thinking': the development of Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in Latin America, the Notre Dame study of the changing US parish system, and national and regional episcopal conferences. We will take the first case, BECs, to explore what Sanks means by analogical thinking. He writes,

the question has been raised as to whether or not these BECs can be called "church." Are they merely natural groupings, or a passing manifestation of the postmodern quest for community? Or are they, as Boff and others have claimed, a new way of being church, a church of the people, from below, a true expression of the Church as People of God? Do they pose a challenge or a threat to other forms of church such as parish or diocese, and to a hierarchically ordered church in general?⁴⁸⁴

Sanks suggests dealing with these questions by thinking analogically about church. His idea of analogical thinking comes from David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination*. Tracy suggests that Catholic Christianity is characterised by its analogical imagination. Very simply, this means that Catholic systematic theology tends to proceed by ordering its diverse themes around a central event: God's self-disclosure in Christ.⁴⁸⁵ This becomes what Tracy calls the 'prime analogate': everything else in the theological

⁴⁸³ T Howland Sanks, 'Forms of Ecclesiality: The Analogical Church,' *Theological Studies* 49:4 (1989): 695–708.

⁴⁸⁴ Sanks, 'Analogical Church' 697. Gerard Mannion also makes use of Sanks' work in Mannion, *Ecclesiology in Postmodernity* 179–83, but develops it in a different direction, into what he calls 'virtue ecclesiology'.

⁴⁸⁵ David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (London: SCM, 1981) 408.

system is ordered to it and interpreted in light of it.⁴⁸⁶ This process of analogical ordering around a central event illuminates that event, just as the event itself illuminates and orders the theological account of reality. Yet the central event of God's self-disclosure in Christ always remains a mystery, and the fullness of its meaning is never captured or exhausted by the process of analogical theology. Catholic systematic theology is therefore characterised by a constant analogical movement between God and all that is not God.⁴⁸⁷ It is also characterised by a constant movement between negative and positive theology: the positive theology that draws the analogy, and reveals a similarity between God and the world, and the negative theology that always highlights the limited nature of the analogy, and the fundamental dissimilarity between God and the world.⁴⁸⁸ Sanks writes,

I would contrast the analogical mode of thinking with a dichotomous mode, which stresses that relationships are either/or: either completely alike or completely different. This mode of thinking does not see proportional relationships between different entities or structures but stresses only the differences. It can only replicate or repeat its focal meaning rather than allow that focal meaning to illuminate new experiences or structures.⁴⁸⁹

Sanks recommends that we think about church as an analogical concept, rather than in strict either/or, church/not-church terms. A dialectical mode of thinking about the church expects the same form of ecclesiality to be replicated everywhere. An analogical mode of thinking about church finds a prime analogate for the church, and then considers various forms of church as they relate to this central meaning. Sanks writes,

if the prime analogate for being church is a community of disciples gathered in the name of Jesus—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am also present" (Mt 18:20)—then there would be no question of whether or not the base communities are truly "church." They clearly are, and they are analogous to other forms of church in historical experience..."Church" is and always has been an analogical notion, as its use

⁴⁸⁶ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination* 410–1.

⁴⁸⁷ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination* 409.

⁴⁸⁸ Tracy, *Analogical Imagination* 411–3.

⁴⁸⁹ Sanks, 'Analogical Church' 703.

in the New Testament verifies.⁴⁹⁰

Sanks argues that the various different historical forms of church are all analogously related to one another: it is by exploring these different forms as analogies of a focal meaning that we can gain a sense of the church as a whole.⁴⁹¹

In Sanks' paper, we begin to see what it might mean theologically to think of the church as an analogical concept. Some work needs doing, however, to join up his idea of church as an analogical concept with the idea of church as a family resemblance concept. For Wittgenstein, the concept 'games' does not form a family because all the examples we might give of games (chess, snakes and ladders, rugby) are all 'vertically' related by likeness to a single archetypal game or prime analogate. The concept 'games' forms a family because of what we might call 'horizontal' relationships – multiple similarities that crop up and disappear again. Sanks' use of the idea of analogy tends towards the 'vertical' sense: he talks of the church being 'embodied' in different historical forms, (which suggests that the church also has a 'disembodied' existence apart from and prior to the particular forms it takes in history) and his method still involves selecting us a 'focal meaning' to which all the

⁴⁹⁰ Sanks, 'Analogical Church' 703–4. He adds, 'If we think of church as analogical, the question of base communities eventually replacing parishes as a form of ecclesiality evanesces. We can have both/and rather than either/or. Boff and other enthusiastic proponents of base communities may indeed speak of a church arising from the grass roots, but this need not imply the withering away of the parish structure.' (704).

⁴⁹¹ He writes, 'All the various forms of ecclesiality have been conditioned by the circumstances and needs of the time. The forms we develop for our time are no less church for that reason..."Church" is and always has been an analogical notion, and the forms in which it has been embodied are historically conditioned but analogously related one to another. This means that there will be differences within similarities, but then that is precisely how the focal meaning of Catholic Christianity, the Incarnation, has enabled us to envision or imagine all of reality.' Sanks, 'Analogical Church' 707–8. Some concrete ecclesialogists also think of church along analogical lines. Jinkins argues, 'Examining biblical witnesses to the early church, we do not find a single homogeneous or monolithic "community of faith." On the contrary, we find a polymorphic cloud of witnessing communities whose shapes change with the times and locales...a plurality of communities in different contexts, bearing sacred traditions often at variance with other communities of faith.' See Jinkins, *The Church Faces Death* 3–4. Pete Ward notes that 'The use of the word *church* in Paul's writings does not indicate any one set pattern of community life that can guide us as we reimagine church in our context...We see in Paul's writing that what it means to be church cannot be contained in one clear social organization or institution. If we follow Paul, then we can regard a small group as being just as much church as a townwide meeting.' See Ward, *Liquid Church* 8.

analogous forms are related as similarities.

I want to suggest that we need to develop a more ‘horizontal’ understanding of the church’s analogical character. The reason for this links back to a point I made at the end of the previous chapter. Like the ethnographer’s knowledge of the social real, our knowledge of the church is in-the-middle – both in the ordinary sense that we can only know the church from our particular time and place, and in the added theological sense that we are creatures *in via*. This means, I suggested, that theology and ethnography share an important characteristic: we only know the inadequacy of our language from the inside. We have no overall view of the whole that we can use to measure up our particular proposals and constructions about it. While exploring the identity of the church through focussing on one particular image or form can sometimes be helpful and illuminating, our position in-the-middle and on-the-way means that we *cannot* finally find the right focal image, the *mot juste*.⁴⁹² We cannot specify one overall form or image of church that would serve as a measuring stick for all our proposals.⁴⁹³ Like a person lost for a word, we can only multiply examples. We may be able to judge some examples to be better than others, but we cannot do so by comparison to a view of the whole church, either in its concrete complexity or its theological mystery: such a view belongs only to God. In order to develop Sanks’ insights further, without drifting back into essentialism, it will be helpful to look more closely at the New Testament, and explore how the church appears there as an analogical notion in the more horizontal sense I am aiming for.

⁴⁹² I think this adds something to Healy’s critique of twentieth century ecclesiology, namely that it often ended up lost in deciding which model or focal meaning was the right one. (Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 32–3, 36.) The point is not just that such a quest is less than helpful ‘on the rough ground’, but also that our position *in via* makes a final decision on the right image or form of the church impossible.

⁴⁹³ This relates to Kathryn Tanner’s comments about our inability to fix the criteria for Christian faithfulness in advance, which I discuss below, 204–5.

ii) *The New Testament witness*

Perhaps the clearest indication that ‘church’ is an analogical notion in the New Testament is the fact that the word ‘church’ is not uniformly used as a term for describing the earliest Christian communities.⁴⁹⁴ Not all the New Testament writings use the term *ekklesia* and, where they do, the term has a range of meanings.⁴⁹⁵ It is most commonly used to indicate local gatherings of Christian believers – we read about the church gathering in the house of Prisca and Aquila, for example (Rom 16:3–5), and the churches of Macedonia (2 Cor 8:1). But the term ‘church’ is also used in a second sense, to indicate *the* church as a whole, which suggests that the church is already being thought of as existing in some more abstract sense, on a level that transcends the particular churches (e.g. Col 1.24).⁴⁹⁶ ‘Church’ is only one of a number of terms used to describe the earliest Christian communities.⁴⁹⁷ As well as being described using a variety of terms, the church is also described using a range of metaphors and images – as the body of Christ, as the household of God, as exiles and as citizens.⁴⁹⁸ Some of these images are used more frequently than others, but the most well-worn are used in a range of different and interlocking ways. The use of the image ‘body of Christ’ in the Pauline epistles is a good example.⁴⁹⁹ In Ephesians, we

⁴⁹⁴ It is used by Matthew, Acts and the Pauline corpus; it is not found in Mark, Luke, John, 1 or 2 Peter.

⁴⁹⁵ Gooder argues that ‘it is not possible to explain the development of Christian community with primary recourse to the word as its usage is sporadic and inconsistent.’ See Paula Gooder, ‘In Search of the Early Church’ in Mannion and Mudge (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church* 9–27 (10).

⁴⁹⁶ The Letter to the Ephesians, particularly in chapter 5, contains a good few examples of Paul using the word ‘church’ in this extended sense.

⁴⁹⁷ Other include ‘the Way’ in Acts (e.g. 9:2; 18:25–6; 22:4), ‘Saints’ (e.g. Acts 9:32; Rom 1:7; Heb 13:24) and, rather more rarely, ‘Christians’ (Acts 11:26).

⁴⁹⁸ Paul Minear writes, ‘Conservatively estimated, there are more than eighty of them, but this number might readily be increased to one hundred if the various Greek words were counted separately.’ See Paul S Minear *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961) 28.

⁴⁹⁹ Minear states that ‘the phrase “body of Christ” is not a single expression with an unchanging meaning.’ See Minear, *Images of the Church* 173.

find the image used to emphasise the importance of unity (4:4–6) and the different parts of the church working together (4:16), but we also see it used to talk about authority and order in the church (1.22; 5:23) and the parity of Gentile believers with Jewish believers (3:6). In the first letter to the Corinthians, the image is used to emphasise the importance of unity and interdependence in the Christian community (12:12–20), but then the metaphor shifts slightly to reinforce importance of looking after the most vulnerable members of the community (12:22–4). There is no single image that dominates or orders all the others; rather, what we see is a series of overlapping similarities in how the early Christian communities describe themselves. The proliferation of descriptive terms and images for the early Christian communities in the New Testament suggests that these communities were ‘fumbling to find words and images to describe themselves both internally and externally’ – lacking, as it were, the *mot juste*.⁵⁰⁰

As well as using a range of terms and images to describe the earliest Christian communities, the New Testament witness also suggests that these communities existed in varied and interlocking forms. It seems that a good many early communities of believers existed in a complex and changing relationship with the synagogue: in Acts we can see from Paul’s account of his persecution that Christians were to be found in synagogues (Acts 9.2; 22.19); we can also see that, by the time John’s gospel was written, there were considerable tensions and followers of Jesus were being thrown out of synagogues (Jn 16:2).⁵⁰¹ Other Christian communities, however, seemed to

⁵⁰⁰ Gooder, ‘In Search of the Early Church’ 15.

⁵⁰¹ This development also seems to be read back into the tradition at Jn 9:22 and 12:42. James Burtchaell argues that we should understand Christian worship and polity as growing out of the synagogue tradition. For a brief statement of his argument, see James Burtchaell, *From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 180–200.

centre on the household (Acts 16:15; 1 Cor 16:15).⁵⁰² The texts of the New Testament do not give us a comprehensive picture of early Christian communities' belief and practice, and the snapshots they do give seem to show both variation and development in their practices.⁵⁰³ Sharing meals seems to have been an important part of early Christian practice (Acts 2:42, 2:46), but it is not clear where straightforward table fellowship ends, and celebration of the Lord's supper begins.⁵⁰⁴ And although Paul gives clear guidelines for celebrating the memorial of the Lord's supper in 1 Cor 11, it remains unclear, as Gooder points out, whether or not Paul's guidelines were followed by other Pauline communities, or by non-Pauline communities.⁵⁰⁵ Circumcision (Gal 2; Acts 15) and dietary laws (Acts 10:9–16; 11:1–12) also seem to have been areas of varying practice and subsequent tensions within and between early Christian communities. Again, what we see in the New Testament witness is not one stable, concrete form of the church, but a range of communities related by overlapping similarities.

The earliest Christian communities form a family, not because they all believe and practice the same things in exactly the same way, nor because they share a clear

⁵⁰² Wayne Meeks argues that 'The meeting places of the Pauline groups, and probably of most other early Christian groups, were private houses.' He suggests, however, that Paul 'probably uses *kat' oikon* to distinguish these individual household-based groups from "the whole church" (*hole he ekklesia*), which could also assemble on occasion (1 Cor 14:23; Rom 16:23; cf. 1 Cor 11:20), or from the still larger manifestations of the Christian movement, for which he could use the same term, *ekklesia*.' See Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 75; see also Meeks' comments on the 'whole church' sense of *ekklesia*, *ibid.* 108–10.

⁵⁰³ Acts 2:44–5 and 4:32, for example, suggest that the early Christians sold all they had and shared the proceeds, but it is also clear later on that some members continued to own houses (Acts 21:16; Col 4:15, against the general practice suggested in Acts 4:34) in which the early Christian communities met.

⁵⁰⁴ Paul's criticism of the Corinthians, Gooder argues, 'suggests a development/change in the significance of table fellowship. In 1 Corinthians 11.22 he suggests that they should eat and drink at home and in 11.34 that if they are hungry they should eat first. Thus the community meal becomes more about fellowship than it does about eating; it is the meeting together to remember Jesus that is the most important.' See Gooder, 'In Search of the Early Church' 21.

⁵⁰⁵ She adds, 'It is quite possible that Paul has a more normative influence on the church in the twenty-first century than he ever did on the first-century communities.' See Gooder, 'In Search of the Early Church' 16.

theological sense of what it means to be church, but because they are *recognisable* to one another.⁵⁰⁶ They recognise one another because of overlapping similarities in their belief and practice, and also because they recognise one another as engaged in the same struggle to work out what it means to follow Jesus. I have suggested that the New Testament witness cannot give us a comprehensive picture of one original concrete form of the church, to which all others are related as analogies, nor a single dominant theological image for the church. This does not mean, of course, that the New Testament witness concerning the church is not significant or authoritative for subsequent ecclesiological reflection. It does mean that we need to clarify how the New Testament witness acts as a key example for our explanation of the word 'church'. This will help us to explore in more general terms the significance of explaining 'church' by giving examples.

iii) The function of samples

How does the New Testament witness to the faith and practice of the earliest Christians guide subsequent ecclesiological reflection? The temptation to distil some essential properties of church from the New Testament witness is a hard one to resist. Surely, we think, we can pull out *some* core practices – fellowship, mission, charity, baptism – and create from these a basic understanding of what church should do and be, which we can then use as a measuring stick. We can, and we might, but I want to suggest that we should not. As soon as we begin to abstract away from the particularities of the New Testament picture towards a general template of church, we begin to lose the significance of explanation by example. We begin to treat the New

⁵⁰⁶ They greet one another (1 Pet 5:13; Rom 16:16, 23; 1 Cor 16:19), and the fact that apostles (and others) can travel between communities and be received in them suggests they recognise one another. In Col 4:16, Paul asks that his letter to the community at Colossus be also read in the community at Laodicea, and vice versa.

Testament as an example *in spite* of its particularity, rather than because of it.

Wittgenstein stages a short conversation to make a similar point:

‘A ruler does measure in spite of its corporeality; of course a ruler which only has length would be the Ideal, you might say the *pure* ruler.’ No, if a body has length, there can be no length without a body – and although I realize that in a certain sense only the ruler’s length measures, what I put in my pocket remains the ruler, the body, and isn’t the length.⁵⁰⁷

Sometimes, focussing theological attention on the ‘length’ of the New Testament account of church rather than on its ‘body’ can be helpful. But such efforts should come with a health warning: there is a risk that we end up putting concepts before experience. What does this mean? In chapter three, we saw Kirsten Hastrup argue that concepts like society and religion are ‘persuasive fictions’.⁵⁰⁸ They are concepts that we use to interpret and express our experience, but the fit between experience and theory is not exact. Some of these concepts become so useful that we ‘ontologically dump’ them, and begin to think and speak of them as objective realities. This process is not a problem in itself, but it can pose difficulties if anthropologists forget the ontologically dumped nature of their objects of study, and put definitions or concepts, whether these are of ‘society’, ‘religion’ or ‘church’, before the experiences they summarise.⁵⁰⁹ The danger then is that the anthropologist ends up investigating their concept rather than exploring the particular experiences that produce such abstract concepts in the first place. If we focus on the ‘length’ of the New Testament accounts of church, rather than on their ‘body’, then we risk putting our desire for a unified concept of ‘church’ before the experience of the New

⁵⁰⁷ Wittgenstein, *PR* §81. Baker and Hacker comment, ‘It is extraordinarily hard to recognize that concrete objects used as samples in explaining or applying expressions belong to our grammar or our method of representation. We are tempted to think that these objects are merely incidental, that the *real* samples are Platonic or mental entities (e.g. the *length* of the standard metre, the *colour* of the patch on the chart, or the *image* of this colour in the mind of the perceiver.)’ Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 114.

⁵⁰⁸ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 262.

⁵⁰⁹ ‘We should realize that most of what we study in the human sciences are ontologically situated, *not* in the things themselves, but in our experience of them. Where are the objective entities of “religion,” “aesthetics,” or “culture” for instance, if not in our experience of their real, material impact, summed up in words, but not represented by them.’ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 260–1.

Testament communities themselves. These are communities engaged in a struggle to work out for themselves, both in their concrete life and in their theological imagery, what it means to be a community of believers in Jesus. They are united – as far as we can tell – not by a clear set of characteristics, but a shared desire to gather around the person and teaching of Jesus, and a shared sense ‘of the importance of figuring it out’.⁵¹⁰

The question is, what now? If the New Testament cannot give us a comprehensive account of the form of the earliest Christian communities, or a unified theological understanding of them and if, as I have argued, we should not try to distil from the information that we have some generic ‘New Testament church’, then how *do* we understand its significance as a key example for explaining ‘church’? The important thing here is to focus our attention on the practice of *giving an example*. Take the example of a book called *The Spotter’s Guide to Dogs*. If we flick through the pages, we will find lots of photographs of pedigree dogs, together with descriptions of their breed history, physical characteristics, needs and temperaments. In order for the guide to be useful, the dogs in the photographs and descriptions will have to be typical examples of their breed, representative of that kind of dog - there would not be much sense in including a picture of a three-legged Labrador, for example, because it would make us suppose that three legs is characteristic of the breed. But imagine now that I allow a small child to cut around the photograph of the Old English Sheepdog and glue it onto a collaged farm scene. That picture has now ceased to be a sample.⁵¹¹ The point here is that, while samples do need to be in some way

⁵¹⁰ Discussing the concept of Christian ‘identity’, Kathryn Tanner argues that ‘[w]hat unifies Christian practices is not...agreement about the beliefs and actions that constitute true discipleship; but a shared sense of the importance of figuring it out.’ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 152.

⁵¹¹ Baker and Hacker give the example of taking a sample of carpet from a sample-book in a carpet shop and using it to carpet a dolls house. See Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 99.

representative of the group of which they are a sample, *calling them a sample characterises their role, and not their intrinsic features*.⁵¹²

We use the New Testament accounts of the earliest Christian communities as a key example for ecclesiological reflection because we hold that their belief and practice (or what we know of it) is (or ought to be) representative of churches in general. This means that we need to focus our theological attention not on the intrinsic features of the communities we glimpse through these accounts, but on the *role* of these accounts: the double-sided fact that we recognise ourselves as church because of our relation to them, and that we recognise them as church because of their relation to us. We look at the New Testament accounts of early Christian communities like we might look at an old photograph of a long-dead relative we have never met: we scrutinise their face for some likeness with our own, precisely because we already understand ourselves to be related to them. If we want to understand church as an analogical, or family resemblance concept, we need to do two things: first, to notice the simple *fact* of our recognition of both the New Testament communities and the ordinary communities we encounter and name as church on a day to day basis and, second, to reflect theologically on this practice of recognition.

b) The practice of recognition

The concept of recognition crops up reasonably regularly in Wittgenstein's work.⁵¹³ He uses examples of recognising familiar people, pictures or objects to critique the idea that we recognise from mental images or templates, in much the same way as he

⁵¹² Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 99.

⁵¹³ *PI* §§602–4; *Z* §§608–10.

uses examples of following rules to critique the idea that we follow rules by constant mental consultation. His discussions of recognition and rule-following are also used to undermine the idea that thinking, meaning and understanding are mental processes, and the idea that we name objects mentally every time we use a word.⁵¹⁴

He writes,

Asked “Did you recognize your desk when you entered your room this morning?” –I should no doubt say “Certainly!” And yet it would be misleading to say that an act of recognition had taken place... It is easy to have a false picture of the processes called “recognizing”; as if recognizing always consisted in comparing two impressions with one another. It is as if I carried a picture of an object with me and used it to perform an identification of an object as the one represented by the picture.⁵¹⁵

What Wittgenstein is critiquing here is the philosophical impulse to *explain* – the idea that the regular human activity of remembering or recognising *must* involve our checking things against hypothetical mental images.⁵¹⁶ Wittgenstein wants to draw our attention away from such speculation, back to the quiet weighing of linguistic facts.⁵¹⁷

Wittgenstein uses recognition as a critical tool, not a positive theory. He is not suggesting that the unity of the family resemblance concept ‘game’ lies in our ability to recognise all games as such, nor that all games share a hypothetical property (‘recognisability-as-games’) that make them a family.⁵¹⁸ Wittgenstein simply wants to focus our attention on the *fact* – the language-game – of recognition. In the same

⁵¹⁴ Z §§605–6: ‘One of the most dangerous of ideas for a philosopher is, oddly enough, that we think with our heads or in our heads. The idea of thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, gives him something occult.’ See also *PI* §601 ‘When I talk about this table, –am I *remembering* that this object is called a “table”?’

⁵¹⁵ *PI* §602, §604.

⁵¹⁶ Norman Malcolm writes, ‘Philosophical and psychological theories of memory arise because the theorists cannot accept this regularity as a plain fact. They try to *explain* it by introducing an intermediary – a retained mental image, or a physiological trace – to bridge the temporal gap between the witnessing and subsequent recollection. When we scrutinize these intermediaries, we realise that they are powerless to do the trick. Malcolm, *Wittgenstein* 67–8.

⁵¹⁷ Z §447.

⁵¹⁸ ‘If X and Y are each one metre long, then they have the same length, i.e. the length of X is identical with the length of Y. But it does not follow that to say that X and Y have the same length is to say that there is some length that they share...’ Baker and Hacker, *Meaning and Understanding* 181. See *BB* 55.

way, I want to focus attention on the *fact* of our recognising churches: that we do so fairly unreflectingly, that we do so without a mental template or image of what church should be, do or look like, and that we can give and accept multiple different examples of church. Like the person sent to buy apples at the beginning of the *Investigations*, we recognise churches not because we have charts of beliefs or colour-swatches of practices, but because our ordinary acquaintance with particular churches gives us the ability to recognise them. I want to place more theological weight on the culturally embedded and Spirit-guided *practice of recognition*.

i) Culturally embedded

Talking about discerning church in terms of recognition allows us to acknowledge the degree to which naming and recognising church are learned abilities which have become intuitively followed practices.⁵¹⁹ We recognise churches almost unreflectingly, before we realise what is happening. It is important to acknowledge this because it helps us to be reflexive about the cultural assumptions that lie behind our recognising of church. When we acknowledge that we recognise churches (or not) because of our own ingrained and culturally particular understandings of what churches should be, do and look like, we are better able to hold our own experience, with its normative claims about what church should be and do, as relative to its time and place. When we think about identifying the church in terms of holding up different churches to a single descriptive and normative template drawn from scripture and church tradition, we obscure the degree to which all such normative and descriptive templates are deeply implicated in the preoccupations and prejudices of

⁵¹⁹ See *PI* §381 ‘How do I know that this colour is red? –It would be an answer to say: “I have learnt English”.’

their age.⁵²⁰

More positively, the culturally embedded nature of recognition also shows that it is an *ability* that depends on our ‘socialisation’ into the church. In the same way as our ability to recognise those who are likely to mug us depends on our socialisation into a certain sort of urban society – one where we mistrust lone men loitering in dark alleys, for example – our ability to recognise church depends on our ‘socialisation’ into a community of people who are constantly seeking to understand what it means, in faith and practice, to follow Christ. By making this point, I am not trying to suggest that the church is a ‘society’ or culture, nor that only holy people are qualified to pronounce on whether or not a given community is faithful or unfaithful, church or not-church.⁵²¹ Rather, I am trying to draw attention to the fact that meaningful use of the word ‘church’ is fixed by public criteria, not my private feelings.⁵²² This point is important for both my description of church as an analogical concept, and my appeal to our ordinary practice of recognising churches.

Earlier on, I suggested that the church was like ‘love’: we can point to examples of it, but any attempt to describe love in the abstract results in a definition that has none of the concrete character of love. Yet to say that love cannot be abstractly defined, and that it is a matter of recognition, is not to say that we can identify love as being present in a situation with no warrant at all, as if mere intuition were enough – we cannot reasonably intuit that someone loves someone else in spite of all appearances to

⁵²⁰ The question we must always ask such normative templates (as well as our normative examples) is, ‘Who is it, here, that gets to say what church should be and do?’ See Mary McClintock Fulkerson’s comments about the relationship of doctrine and practice in Miroslav Volf’s work, and the assumptions it entails, in her *Places of Redemption* 232.

⁵²¹ On the contrary – I will argue below that we may come to a fuller understanding of church by exploring the margins of the concept, rather than trying to define its centre. See below 219–21.

⁵²² Although Wittgenstein notes that we are not always able to *give* explanations for concepts when asked, but also that this inability does not mean we are not using the word intelligibly most of the time. See *BB* 17.

the contrary. 'Love' may be a matter of intuition, but there are public criteria for meaningful use of the word. These public criteria are not a shared understanding of the common characteristics of love (there isn't one), nor the minimum conditions necessary for meaningful application of the term (what would they be?). Nor are the rules complete – they allow for improvisation. In fact, we cannot describe these public criteria for the correct use of the word 'love' much more precisely than a simple appeal to our 'way of going on' with the word.

The same points need to be reinforced about our analogical use of the word 'church', and our recognition of churches. Knowing what 'church' means and being able to recognise churches does not mean possessing a definition, but an ability: we show that we understand the word 'church' by giving meaningful examples. What constitutes a meaningful example of church is governed by public criteria, our way of going on with the word. It is these public criteria to which we might appeal if we were to substantiate our recognition of a community as church. We might suggest, for example, that we recognise a community as church because it professes belief in Jesus as the Son of God, meets regularly to read the Bible, and celebrates a memorial of Jesus' last supper with his disciples. We would appeal to the well-worn forms of Christian life that are part of our way of going on with the word 'church'. In doing so, we would not be expressing a tacit understanding or definition of church that, in some occult way, we referred to every time we recognised a church. Nor would we be appealing to a shared understanding of what church should be, do and look like - a sort of lowest common denominator that everyone understands to be church. What we would be appealing to would be our 'way of going on' with the word, and our common *grounds of argument*.

Kathryn Tanner argues that the Christian ‘public’ is constituted not so much by common beliefs and practices as by argument around issues of common concern. Christians can come together over the forms of things, if not their substance: to take Tanner’s example, we may agree that Jesus saves, or that ritual meals should be eaten in church, even if we do not agree about the meaning of such statements and gestures.⁵²³ Yet she also argues that these common forms are not common enough or stable enough to form the basis of a once-and-for all definition of the Christian ‘way of going on’.⁵²⁴ Tanner argues that, ‘while they set the terms for argument, the forms themselves are not immune from questioning as the argument proceeds.’⁵²⁵ She also notes that argument does not always arise over the same issues: ‘[a]lmost any element of Christian practice has the capacity to become a focus of concern; indeed, every part of it has some claim to such a position – as a place, to use specifically theological language, where God’s Word or directing Spirit may be heard or felt.’⁵²⁶ Although our meaningful use of the term church is moored in a concrete way of going on with the word, and governed by common grounds of argument, both these can shift and change. This means, Tanner argues, that there is no way of fixing once and for all what faithfulness looks like, or determining what Christian practice will come to include or exclude over the course of time.⁵²⁷ There is only a concrete way of going on – or, as she puts it, a community of argument.⁵²⁸ This community of argument

⁵²³ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 121–2.

⁵²⁴ Tanner criticises postliberal appeals to stable ‘rules’ of Christian belief and action in this connection: ‘Such a strategy for assuring Christian identity is only plausible if the rules can be insulated from the vicissitudes of history...In the effort to support the claim of a stable Christian identity, postliberals appear to be lifting the rules out of the ongoing historical processes that formed them, as if, once produced, they could not be altered by the same processes in the future.’ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 138–9.

⁵²⁵ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 127.

⁵²⁶ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 127.

⁵²⁷ ‘One may sum up what Christianity stands for in the process of judging what one must do here and now. But, since the Word of God is a free Word, the meaning of discipleship – what it really means to be a Christian – cannot be summed up in any neat formula that would allow one to know already what Christian discipleship will prove to include or exclude over the course of time.’ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 155.

⁵²⁸ Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 156. Amy Plantinga Pauw criticises Tanner’s idea of a community of

has its unity not on the basis of some red thread of common practice and belief stretched across the centuries, but by the fact that we recognise one another as engaged in the same struggle to work out, for our own time and place, what it means to be followers of Jesus.

Our ability to recognise churches, then, is both enabled and constrained by our position 'in the middle'. Acknowledging the culturally embedded nature of our recognition of church is important. It helps us to realise that our understanding of what church should be, do and look like is limited by our time and place, and informed as much by our cultural milieu as our theological convictions.⁵²⁹ This, in turn, helps us to acknowledge the provisional character of our ecclesiological constructions and judgements. But acknowledging the culturally embedded character of our practice of recognition is not just about a methodological commitment to reflexivity. It is also a theological conviction, for if the Holy Spirit guides the church into the fullness of the truth, then she does so in and through (and sometimes in spite of) our *actual* process of recognition, not through the definition that we think we ought to have.⁵³⁰ This means we need to talk more about the role of the Spirit.

argument: 'On its own, 'community of argument' is of course not an adequate ecclesial image, either empirically or theologically. The vast majority of Christians have never participated in the kind of 'open debate' Tanner advocates regarding ecclesial beliefs and practices, and do not have anything like her rich and nuanced knowledge of the tradition with which to fund their arguments.' She does, however, suggest that reference to a 'community of argument' is an important way of balancing Tanner's appeal to a community of mutual fulfillment: see Pauw, 'Ecclesiological Reflections on Kathryn Tanner's *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity*' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57:2 (2004): 221–27 (226–7). Tanner responds to Pauw's criticism in her 'Church and Action', the conclusion of which I cite above 108–9.

⁵²⁹ Healy draws attention to the way in which Christians 'pick and choose' their beliefs and practices, not just from the resources of the church, but also from the resources of their own particular cultural milieu. See Healy, 'Chastened Ecclesiology' 12.

⁵³⁰ This theological commitment to ordinary faith I draw from Rahner: 'Moreover, it is the faith in the Church that actually exists in heads and hearts, and not properly official Church doctrine, that immediately and in itself is *the faith* that constitutes the church... We may not judge this faith by its objective verbal contents. Even when its objectification in words and concepts is very poor and deficient it is still God's action in us, constituted by the self-communication of God in the Holy Spirit. The *depositum fidei* is not first and foremost a sum of statements formulated in human language. It is God's Spirit, irrevocably communicated to humankind, activating in persons the salutary faith that they really possess. Of course, the same Spirit also brings forth in this way the community of the faithful, in

ii) *Spirit guided*

Attending to our ordinary practice of recognising church helps us to recognise the *in via* character of our knowledge of the church, and our judgements about it. I want to suggest here that attending to the practice of recognition might also give us a richer theological language for talking about how we discern and identify church. We will explore some of the theological potential of the concept of recognition, first by looking briefly at its use in the ecumenical movement, and then by looking at the role of the Holy Spirit.

Recognition is a concept with some theological pedigree. When the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry documents were sent out to local churches in 1982, the questions for reflection that accompanied the text centred on recognition: whether local churches recognised their own faith in these documents, and whether they could recognise them as representing the faith of the wider church.⁵³¹ Although the concept of recognition appeared in a number of ecumenical exchanges and documents, the concept never became the focus of sustained and explicit theological attention in its own right. Gerard Kelly points out that this resulted in a number of different understandings of the term.⁵³² On one hand, 'recognition' meant one church acknowledging another's belief and practice to be authentic or legitimate on the basis

which the unity and fullness of Christian faith are objectified and brought to consciousness in what we perceive as the official faith of the institutional Church. Nevertheless, what really matters above all is the faith that really lives in the ordinary Christian. That is the faith that actually saves, in which God communicates himself to humanity, however pitiful and fragmentary its conceptualization may be.' See Rahner, 'What the Church Teaches' 169–70. Rahner therefore argues that ordinary faith is normative (properly understood, he adds) for both official church teaching and theological reflection (175).

⁵³¹ See the preface to the World Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission, 'Paper No. 111 Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,' (1982).

⁵³² Gerard Kelly, *Recognition: Advancing Ecumenical Thinking* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996) 26.

of an existing underlying unity or understanding shared by both. It is recognition of *similarity* – recognition of unity in spite of difference. Paul VI, for example, writes that '[r]ecognition means that churches can see that, beyond the different words and the different theological expressions, the one and unique apostolic faith is being professed.'⁵³³ In Catholic-Lutheran dialogues, on the other hand, recognition was more about recognising *differences* between the two communions.⁵³⁴ It took on a more juridical meaning, referring to the way in which the other's offices, sacraments or ministries might be recognised as legitimate and authentic *in* their difference, rather than in spite of them. In his *Church of Churches*, Jean Marie Tillard also suggests that recognition is not a 'simple juridical process but a genuine spiritual process':

In this encounter of one church with another there is always the possibility that it may come to apprehend its own faith in a new way. This process of "re-cognition" is not a once-for-all-event, but continues throughout the life of the church.⁵³⁵

Understanding recognition as a genuinely *spiritual* process has a great deal to offer the understanding of the church and ecclesiology that I have developed thus far. When communities recognise one another as church, this may mean there are substantial and concrete similarities between their belief and practice. Yet recognition need not be recognition of an underlying unity, a lowest common denominator of belief and practice to which both communities can agree. It can be the recognition of difference, in style or substance, which challenges our understanding of what church should be and do. Recognition is also 're-cognition', as Tillard has it – in encountering those whose faithfulness takes a different shape from our own, we are engaged in a constant process of re-thinking the church.

⁵³³ Kelly, *Recognition* 12.

⁵³⁴ Kelly, *Recognition* 25.

⁵³⁵ Kelly, *Recognition* 14–15.

This idea of recognition across difference resonates with some of the anthropological ideas we encountered in chapter three. We saw there that ethnographic texts work by pointing out differences in human experience, and in doing so they depend on what James Clifford calls an ‘abstract plane of similarity’.⁵³⁶ In coming to understand others’ lives, as Clifford puts it, ‘a difference is posited and transcended’.⁵³⁷ This is what makes ethnographic texts allegorical: they constantly shuttle between the unfamiliar world of the objects of study, and the familiar world of the reader. This is partly because of the way human beings understand things: we understand what we do not know in terms of what we do. What good ethnography shows us is that this allegorical way of understanding does not mean that we never grow in understanding of ourselves or others: rather, in encountering others and understanding them, we expand our sense of what being human means.⁵³⁸ Anthropology is possible because we are *imaginable* to one another.⁵³⁹ I suggest that we should understand this process of recognition and re-cognition as a place of the Spirit’s working, and our ‘imaginability’ to one another as a gift of the Spirit.

⁵³⁶ Clifford, ‘On Ethnographic Allegory’ 101. For Wittgenstein, agreement in forms of life is the basis of understanding. He writes, ‘The common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by which we interpret an unknown language.’ *PI* §206. Fergus Kerr comments on the difference between Donald Davidson and Wittgenstein in this respect: for Davidson, shared *beliefs* are what produce understanding across difference, for Wittgenstein, agreement in forms of life is the basis of understanding: ‘For Davidson, to think of a conceptual framework is to think of a *language*; but for Wittgenstein, to think of a language is to think of some *activity*...’. See Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein* 106–9.

⁵³⁷ Clifford, ‘On Ethnographic Allegory’ 99.

⁵³⁸ Joel Robbins writes very interestingly on the way in which anthropology and theology ‘mock’ one another. Anthropology mocks theology by discovering and demonstrating ‘that there are viable ways of conceiving and living life that are different from their own’. Theologians mock anthropologists ‘by the confidence they have that the differences they find are really fundamental ones that point to wholly different ways of living—a fact which, as I will show, should be a matter of theoretical concern for anthropologists—and by their sense that their committed readers really might take the bait and let these differences transform their lives—a belief that makes the critical force of theology far more palpable in print than it tends to be in anthropological writing these days.’ See Joel Robbins, ‘Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?’ *Anthropological Quarterly* 81 (2008): 285–94 (288). His idea of disciplines ‘mocking’ one another comes from Marilyn Strathern, ‘An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology,’ *Signs* 12:2 (1987): 276–92.

⁵³⁹ Hastrup writes, ‘The practice of anthropology presupposes the possibility of human understanding across manifest difference; there is a basic assumption that people are imaginable to one another. We could phrase it like this: people do not live in different worlds, they live differently in the world. Part of what we share is an experience of relativity; conceptual or epistemic relativity, that is, not ontological incommensurability.’ See Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 260.

In John's gospel, the Spirit is portrayed as the Spirit of Christ.⁵⁴⁰ Set as a seal on Jesus (6:27) at his baptism (1:32–4) and present throughout his ministry, the Spirit is associated most of all with Jesus' glorification and return to the Father.⁵⁴¹ Just as Jesus stands in an exclusive relationship to the Father, as the only one who can reveal the Father (1:18) and the only one through whom the Father can be known (14:6), the Spirit stands in an exclusive relationship to Christ: all that the Spirit reveals is taken from Christ, and the Spirit guides believers into the fullness of the truth (16:13).⁵⁴² The Father and Jesus are one, and Jesus and the Spirit are one.⁵⁴³ After Jesus' return to the Father, then, the Spirit has a special relation to those who believe in Jesus. In relation to the believing community, the Spirit is described as the Spirit of truth (14:16–17), the teacher (14:26), and the witness to Christ (15:26). Dwelling in believers (14:17), the Spirit is given to guide believers into the fullness of truth (16:13). Yet although everything the Spirit reveals will be taken from what is Christ's, just as all Christ teaches is from the Father (14:15), the Spirit is not a sort of caretaker, whose task is merely to keep the believing community faithful to a revelation received in the past. The Spirit continues to guide believers *into* truth, into

⁵⁴⁰ It should be noted that there is considerable scholarly debate, and not a great deal of consensus, over the relationship of the Spirit to Christ, and the nature of the Spirit's work in testifying to Christ. A clear summary of the major positions on the meaning of the Greek παρακλητος can be found in Tricia Gates Brown, *Spirit in the Writings of John: Johannine Pneumatology in Social-Scientific Perspective* (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 170–234. Brown herself prefers to translate the word as *mediator* or *broker* (181), and to characterise role of the Paraclete in John in those terms: as a broker who guarantees exclusive access to a benefactor. See her survey of other scholarly positions in *Spirit in the Writings of John* 182–6, and her own exegesis of relevant passages in 186–232. It should be noted that the lack of scholarly consensus over the role of the Spirit in John includes challenges to the identification of the Paraclete with the Spirit. See Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John (XIII–XXI)* (New York: Doubleday, 1970) 653 and the fuller discussion in 1135–44.

⁵⁴¹ Indeed, as a commentary on Jesus' words about living water, John adds 'He was speaking of the Spirit which those who believed in him were to receive; for *there was no Spirit as yet*, because Jesus had not been glorified' (7:39). See also 16:7, where Jesus states that if he does not return to the Father, the Advocate will not come.

⁵⁴² Believers must be born of water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5), and true worship of God is worship in the Spirit (Jn 4:23).

⁵⁴³ As Raymond Brown puts it, 'Jesus bore God's name (xvii 11, 12) because he was the revelation of God to men; the Spirit is sent in Jesus' name because he unfolds the meaning of Jesus to men.' Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 653.

a fuller understanding of what Jesus has revealed: ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...’ (16:12–13).⁵⁴⁴ I want to suggest here that the ongoing presence of the Spirit with the believing community as teacher, advocate and witness to Christ is what guides the constant process of recognition and re-cognition, in which we affirm continuity with the faith and practice of others before and around us, and re-examine our own faithfulness in light of theirs. Recognition of others as church is recognition *in the Spirit*: as the child in Elizabeth leaps at the presence of the unborn Jesus (Lk 1:44), so the Spirit leaps in us as we recognise others as church. When recognising others as church causes us to re-think what church should be, do or look like, this re-cognition is also the work of the Spirit, guiding us into a fuller understanding of what it means to follow Christ.

iii) The Spirit of truth and cultural consensus

Although it is important to see our ordinary practice of recognition as a place of the Spirit’s working, it would be a mistake to necessarily (or too closely) equate the Spirit’s guiding of the church with the church’s general direction, or with the prevailing cultural consensus about what church should be or do. We only have to look at the churches’ implication in slavery and racism to see that Christian intuition owes as much to local prejudice as the Spirit’s inspiration.⁵⁴⁵ In order to address this worry, we need to look at the relationship between the culturally embedded and Spirit guided aspects of recognition. To do this, we return to Wittgenstein again for some

⁵⁴⁴ Raymond Brown translates, ‘he will guide you along the way of all truth’, and adds that ‘Guidance along the way of truth is guidance to the mystery of Jesus who is the truth (John xiv 6).’ See Brown, *The Gospel According to John* 707, 715.

⁵⁴⁵ See Kathryn Tanner’s cautions on appeals to Christian intuition and the example of slavery in Tanner, *Theories of Culture* 141.

clarification.

In his 'The Truth Behind Practices', Christopher Insole critiques what he sees as a common misuse of Wittgenstein by theologians. Such theologians – among whom he includes Yoder and Hauerwas – understand Wittgenstein's theory of meaning well enough, and the connection it makes between the *use* of a word or expression in a community and its meaning. Their misstep, he suggests, is to introduce truth into the equation, and suggest that truth is whatever a community understands to be justified. Truth then becomes immanent to forms of life.⁵⁴⁶ Insole suggests that there are two ways of understanding Wittgenstein's idea of a practice (or language-game), and that very different things happen to the concept of 'truth' depending on which way we follow. The first option is to say that practices are something an actual community does. So, if the community intends that 'to shop' means 'to exchange money for goods', that is what it means – the connection between word and action persists as long as the community intends it.⁵⁴⁷ The second option is to say that words and actions are joined up by '...a way of going on which is repeatable and in principle *communicable*, with criteria for correctness that are public, over and above what simply 'feels right' according to my intentions.'⁵⁴⁸ Insole points out:

Very different things happen to the concept of truth, depending on which option one takes on the interpretation of 'practice'. If one reads 'practice' as an actual community (such as the Church, for instance), then the truth about what it is to 'go on in the same way' with any concept is given by the collective consent of the members of that community. On this interpretation, truth is rendered a collective construct.⁵⁴⁹

But if a practice is simply a 'way of going on' that is communicable, repeatable and has public criteria for its correctness, then the concept of truth is quite different:

⁵⁴⁶ Insole, 'Truth Behind Practices' 366–7, 372–3.

⁵⁴⁷ Insole, 'Truth Behind Practices' 369.

⁵⁴⁸ Insole, 'Truth Behind Practices' 369.

⁵⁴⁹ Insole, 'Truth Behind Practices' 372.

Such a reading of ‘practice’ has no ambitions to collapse truth into our practices, or for any grand theory about the nature of truth: it simply leaves open the possibility that truth transcends the beliefs of a particular community...When, in a community of language users, we learn correct use of the concept ‘truth’, what we learn is not the consensus of the community, but precisely a linguistic gesture outside of this consensus.⁵⁵⁰

Truth, according to the second interpretation of Wittgenstein on practices, is a ‘linguistic gesture outside of consensus.’⁵⁵¹ Appealing to the truth is not appealing to a body of knowledge, and nor is it appealing to whatever a given group of people *believe* to be true. Appealing to the truth is appealing to a standard that relativises our beliefs.⁵⁵² In the same way, while we can appeal to the Spirit of truth’s guiding presence in the church, we cannot equate the Spirit’s guiding with popular consensus – however tempting it may be to do so. It would be wrong, for example, to say that because 98% of Roman Catholics do not think that artificial contraception is wrong, that the Spirit has clearly shown her hand on the matter. Equally, however – and apposite in the context of the same example – we must not equate the Spirit’s guiding with a body of knowledge that can be possessed, controlled or dispensed by any ecclesiastical or worldly authority.⁵⁵³ An appeal to the Spirit of Christ is not an appeal to Christ’s last will and testament, left in the hands of a trusted few, but an appeal to

⁵⁵⁰ Insole, ‘Truth Behind Practices’ 373.

⁵⁵¹ Insole, ‘Truth Behind Practices’ 370.

⁵⁵² The truth to which we appeal may or may not be knowable, but it is used the same way in both respects. Compare the statements, ‘I believe Rusty slept on the sofa while I was out, but it might not be true’, and ‘It is not true that raindrops are tear-shaped in mid air, they are in fact spherical.’

⁵⁵³ In connection with this discussion, it is interesting to note the relationship between truth, consensus and authority in the *sensus fidelium* as explored in *Lumen Gentium*: the church cannot err (e.g. believes truly) when, the body of the faithful, under the guidance of the Magisterium, manifests consensus on a matter of faith or morals (*Lumen Gentium* §12). In the wake of the widespread non-reception of *Humane Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio* clarifies that ‘the “supernatural sense of faith” (13) however does not consist solely or necessarily in the consensus of the faithful. Following Christ, the Church seeks the truth, which is not always the same as the majority opinion.’ (*Familiaris Consortio* §5). On the basis of such statements, one wonders whether lay belief and practice could ever diverge from that of the Magisterium without being thought of as somehow deficient thereby. While *Familiaris Consortio* maintains, in the preceding paragraph, that the discernment of the sense of the faith is given to all the faithful, the variety of gifts and charisms that it invokes seems to render the laity’s sense of the faith effectively meaningless: where it diverges from the teaching of the Magisterium, it is simply wrong. I have suggested that our ability to discern the church is both culturally embedded and Spirit guided. Being culturally embedded in our concrete ‘way of going on’, our sense of faithfulness certainly relates to consensus. But my suggestion that the church itself is an *emergent* reality, whose truth unfolds over time as successive generations work out what it means to follow Christ, might also allow us to understand the *sensus fidelium* as expressing itself through dissent and change.

his living presence, and to his coming judgement. An appeal to the Spirit, then, is an appeal to that final revelation that will come when we will see all things as they truly are, because we will see them in God.

So what is the gift of the Spirit of truth to the church *in via*? The guiding Spirit of truth is what gives the church the ability to go on *together*: she is the Spirit of communion. Our common appeal to the Spirit of truth involves a mutual openness to judgement. Where lengthy and heart-searching discernment still leaves me at odds with my neighbour on a matter of belief or practice, our common appeal to the guiding Spirit of Christ, who will judge all, is what might keep me in church alongside them. The Spirit's guiding does not happen somehow 'underneath' or in spite of such disagreements, but in and through them. The guidance of the Spirit helps us, even when we fail to see eye to eye, to still 'discern the horizon of a 'we'.'⁵⁵⁴

iii) Summary

At the end of chapter three, I suggested that pragmatic/relational ethnography could help us to theologically develop our understanding of the concrete church and our understanding of the task of ecclesiology, by encouraging us to make the connection between *how* we know, and *what* we know. So far in this chapter, I have used Wittgenstein to draw attention to the ordinary ways in which we talk about and recognise church, and have reflected on two ways we might reflect on this theologically: through thinking of church as an analogical concept, and through putting more theological weight on the culturally embedded and Spirit guided practice of recognition. Sanks argues that understanding church as an analogical

⁵⁵⁴ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 140.

concept gives us a way of getting beyond the sort of dichotomous thinking that expects the church to be always and everywhere the same. Instead of thinking in terms of church/not church, we can think of relationships of likeness to a focal meaning or prime analogate. I used Wittgenstein's idea of family resemblance concepts to push this idea a little further: instead of thinking about likeness 'vertically', in relation to a single prime analogate or focal meaning, we can think of likeness 'horizontally', in terms of a family resemblance concept, constituted by multiple overlapping similarities that crop up and disappear. The church has its unity, I have suggested, because we recognise one another as engaged in the same struggle to work out what it means to follow Christ. I then moved on to reflect on the idea of recognition itself. I argued that it was theologically significant not just that there are likenesses, but that we *recognise* others as engaged in this same struggle – others are imaginable to us, not just in their similarity, but in their difference. I suggested that our recognition of others as church needed to be warranted by reference to common grounds of argument. I then went on to explore the concept of recognition through briefly looking at its use in ecumenical dialogue, and then exploring the role of the Spirit in making us imaginable to one another, and guiding us into a fuller understanding of what it means to follow Christ. Drawing on Wittgenstein again helped me to clarify the relationship between the guidance of the Spirit and cultural consensus. What I want to do now is look more closely at how the in-the-middle character of our knowledge of the church might affect how we understand the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.

c) *The purpose of ecclesiological reflection*

I suggested earlier on that ecclesiology has often been understood as a sort of science of ecclesiality, whose task is to discuss and define the essential characteristics that 'make' the church. This focus on defining the church can be apologetic, prompted by a specific pastoral situation that requires us to restate what the church should be, do and look like, but it can equally be found in more constructive studies that set out to theologically explore the church's essential identity. Concrete ecclesiologies are already moving away from this, by avoiding essentialist accounts of church and focussing their theological attention on particular church communities. Following in their footsteps, I have begun to sketch out what an alternative approach to exploring ecclesiality might look like. Rather than explaining 'church' by producing a *Merkmal* definition, I have suggested we could follow Wittgenstein in explaining church by giving *examples*, and exploring how these examples are analogically related as a sort of family. The aim has been to join up *how* we know with *what* we know, and develop a way of exploring ecclesiality that builds on the *in-the-middle* character of our knowledge of the church.

At the end of chapter three, I suggested three similarities between theology and ethnography, which highlighted the 'in-the-middle' character of their mode of knowing, and the temporary character of their knowledge. Both disciplines, I suggested, were personally involving: knowing the reality of the church, like knowing any social real, involves being 'committed in the body'.⁵⁵⁵ Both disciplines also find their language characterised and constrained by their position in-the-middle. Neither theologians nor ethnographers have access to an objective view of the whole which could serve as a measuring rod for their constructions: they only know the inadequacy of their language 'from the inside'. Both disciplines also find themselves constantly

⁵⁵⁵ Jenkins, 'Fieldwork' 451.

having to break and reshape their language in order to do justice to living realities that will always outrun their capacity to describe them. In this chapter, I have picked up on these three characteristics and explored how ecclesiological knowledge is, like the church itself, *in via*: in-the-middle and on-the-way. Drawing this out in three respects will help to develop, if only briefly, an account of the purpose of ecclesiological reflection.

i) Abstracting and expressive theory

In chapter three, we saw pragmatic/relational ethnographers describe the object of ethnographic inquiry as *abstract*, or ontologically dumped. On one hand, this was a way of highlighting the limited nature of anthropological knowledge: an account of the social real can only be produced by abstracting away from particular encounters towards a picture of the whole, and that picture is itself an abstract construct. On the other hand, though, it was a way of highlighting the unique value of anthropological knowledge as *expressive* rather than designative theory. Designative theories, Hastrup suggests, point out things about their objects. The objects are naturalized, and theories can be judged by how well they measure up to the object.⁵⁵⁶ Hastrup suggests that ethnographic theory should be understood as expressive.⁵⁵⁷ Expressive theories do not *point* to things about the world, but *express* or *realise* things about the world. Although ‘what is made expressed is made manifest only by this expression’,

⁵⁵⁶ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 265. The distinction between designative and expressive theory comes from Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 218ff.

⁵⁵⁷ Hastrup, ‘Religion in Context’ 265–6.

reality is not exhausted by the expression, as it may only communicate a fraction of what is available to experience.⁵⁵⁸

The argument of this chapter thus far has suggested that we might also think of ecclesiology's task as *expressing* the reality of the church, rather than designating it. I have proposed that church is an analogical, or family resemblance concept. Rather than explaining the meaning of church by pointing to the essential characteristics of belief and practice shared by all churches, we explain it by giving concrete examples. These examples manifest or express the reality of the church, but they do not exhaust it – neither individually, nor all taken together. We are unable to wholly grasp the reality of the church. This is partly because we are limited by our time and place, and so unable to grasp the concrete reality of the church in its historical and geographical complexity. It is partly because we human creatures *in via*, and so limited in our ability to discern and understand God's action and purposes. It is also, I have suggested, because the reality of the church is itself still unfolding, guided by the ongoing presence of the Spirit. By exploring different examples of church as likenesses of one another, ecclesiology can serve the church's ongoing practices of recognition and re-cognition: the processes of recognition by which we establish our likeness to those forms of church behind and around us, and the processes of re-cognition by which we work out what it means to be faithful in our own time and place, and thus grow towards the fullness of the truth. Ecclesiologists are called to be both pilgrims and cartographers.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁸ Hastrup, 'Religion in Context' 265. A good example of such a theory might be wave and particle theories of light in physics. Both express something about the way in which light can be observed to behave, and neither theory expresses either what the other theory expresses, or the whole of what can be observed.

⁵⁵⁹ This is Geertz's description of the anthropological vocation. See Geertz, *Works and Lives* 10.

ii) *Constructing and the role of wholes*

Pragmatic/relational ethnography, as we saw in chapter three, has the same emphasis on the constructed nature of ethnographic knowledge, and we saw that ethnography's object of inquiry can be understood as a *construct*. This was, again, a way of making the connection between *how* ethnographic knowledge is gained, through fieldwork, and *what* is thereby known. Ethnographic knowledge is gained by the ethnographer creating relationships, entering into particular social roles and situating themselves 'in the amorphous field between subjective and objective'.⁵⁶⁰ From these particular positions, the ethnographer can construct a picture of the whole – a whole that may be only inchoately sensed, if at all, by the social actors themselves.

I want to suggest here that acknowledging the *constructing* character of ecclesiological reflection might be helpful. I have already argued above that our understanding of the church is necessarily partial, limited by our place in our particular social, geographical and historical context, and it advances as we abstract and construct our way towards a fuller picture of the whole. Although concrete ecclesiologies emphasise the importance of focussing theological reflection on the level of the particular, I want to suggest that ecclesiology also quite properly deals with wholes. It does so because it is not just a descriptive discipline, but also a normative one. Ecclesiological reflection, as I have already noted, often occurs when some concrete pastoral situation requires us to clarify what the church should be, do or look like. Ecclesiological reflection might be prompted, for example, by concrete questions like how the parish council should spend a large bequest, or whether a Roman Catholic parish can invite a local Methodist minister, who happens to be a woman, to preach at mass during the Week

⁵⁶⁰ Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 141.

of Prayer for Christian Unity. In discussing these questions, it is likely that we would want to set these problems in the context of wider patterns of church practice or belief, identify major theological issues at stake, refer to the New Testament witness to the early Christian communities' belief and practice, cite historical similarities or point out departure from historical precedent. We might even want to appeal to more abstract definitions of what the church should be, do and look like – naming what we understand to be the identifying marks of the church's belief and practice, for example. In all these cases, we will be setting the particular problem in view of a larger whole, and coming to some judgement about what we should do. In ecclesiology, setting particular problems in the context of a larger whole allows us to come to judgements about what is faithful belief and practice, and what is not, what is faithful development and what is departure from the gospel, what is church and what is not-church. The key is not to identify the wholes we construct with the whole view of the church's concrete life and theological mystery that belongs only to God.

iii) Emerging realities and searching for church

Finally, we saw in chapter three that pragmatic/relational anthropologists understand their object of inquiry as *emergent*. The social real *is* real, but not in the sense of being an objective, stable reality that can be observed as a whole from some vantage point outside it. Rather, the reality of the social emerges as people interact, interpreting one another's behaviour and expressing their experience, and in doing so draw on and are constrained by enduring assumptions and categories. The anthropologist maps this real, which 'persists far longer than events, personalities or interpretations' by placing him or herself in the 'field of tension' between the shared

world of the social and the subjective accounts of the individual.⁵⁶¹ The map thus produced is not identifiable with the social territory itself: it expresses it, but does not exhaust it. The *reality* of the social, then, is manifested not just in the *adequacy* of ethnographic descriptions and analyses, but also in our experience of their *inadequacy*. It is when we experience the *incompleteness* of our ethnographic constructs that the social real emerges as something that outlasts our own interpretation and experience.

The argument of the chapter thus far has suggested that ecclesiologists, too, might want to think of their object of inquiry as emergent. I have suggested that, while we may name and describe the church, we will always lack the *mot juste* – the overall view of the whole that would allow us to specify precisely how our descriptions fall short. I have highlighted that, although we can map the church through providing concrete examples, we can never do so finally or comprehensively. Here, I want to extend these suggestions just a little further, and suggest what they might mean for how we understand the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. If the church is emergent, then its reality is not just what we capture in the adequacy of our theological and ethnographic categories: it is also what we experience when they fail.⁵⁶² It is in these failures that the reality of the church is glimpsed as something that

⁵⁶¹ Jenkins, *Religion in English Everyday Life* 12; Hastrup, 'Social Anthropology' 140. She writes, 'The resulting complexity of the social space, which is a kind of bottom-up causality (not to be confounded with individualism), cannot be observed as a whole, but it can be perceived when anthropologists place themselves in the field of tension between the individual and the social in the same way as the local protagonists. Because the social is not (only) a collection of facts, but also the instituting processes and the connections between them, it cannot be observed or documented as such. This does not mean that it is unreal, only that its reality must be expressed in theoretical terms. In that sense, it has to be written; anthropology cannot revert to modernist assumptions of direct access to objective realities and representations.'

⁵⁶² Jenkins is getting at something similar when he writes, '...the creative potential to expand our understanding of the church lies not in reading into the church's history a uniformity (or, even, a taxonomy) that was never there and trying to develop taxonomies that reflect only this nonexistent uniformity (or harmony). Rather, it lies in detecting the places of paradox and contradiction in our theoretical categories, in describing their nature, and in pressing them further.' See Jenkins, *The Church Faces Death* 64.

outreaches both our theological constructions and ethnographic observations. If what I have argued here holds true, then perhaps ecclesiology should focus less on determining what the church essentially *is*, whether we conceive of that as an objectively existing ideal, or as a lowest common denominator of shared characteristics and practices on a concrete level. If we experience the reality of the church when our certainties about it are called into question, then perhaps our ecclesiology should be focussed on exploring the margins of ecclesiality as well as defining its centre. Ecclesiological reflection would then become not just a centripetal force, but a centrifugal one: it would be focussed not just on drawing together accounts of church, exploring their likenesses and discussing essential ecclesial identity, but also on cataloguing the different ways in which ‘church’ is used and understood, and so helping us to engage in a constant process of breaking and reshaping our certainties about what church should be, do and look like.

3. Summary

This chapter set out to develop concrete ecclesiologies’ understandings of their object of inquiry, the concrete church, and their purpose in undertaking ecclesiological reflection. I suggested that the best way to do this might be to follow the lead of pragmatic/relational ethnography, and join up the ‘how’ of our knowing the church with an account of what we know, and the nature of our inquiry. Exploring Wittgenstein’s attempts to bring philosophy’s attention back to the rough ground of everyday linguistic practice helped us to square theological attention on the ordinary ways in which we use the concept ‘church’ and recognise churches. I followed Sanks in suggesting that church should be understood as an analogical concept, and then explored how the accounts of early Christian communities in the New Testament

might help us to develop what I called a ‘horizontal’ understanding of analogy, more akin to Wittgenstein’s idea of a family resemblance concept. After some comments about the role of samples in ecclesiology, I moved on to reflect on the theological significance of our ordinary practices of recognising churches. I argued that we should understand these processes of recognition as both culturally embedded and Spirit guided, and explored the relationship between the two. The chapter concluded by drawing some conclusions about how we should understand the purpose of ecclesiological inquiry. I have argued throughout the chapter that we should not think of the purpose of ecclesiology as *defining* the church, if that means trying to fix the characteristics of belief and practice common to all that we call church. What has emerged instead is an understanding of ecclesiology’s purpose as something more like *searching* for the church. Basil Hume says something similar about the task of monastic contemplation:

Contemplation is not just looking at God; for most of us, now *in via*, it consists in looking *for* God, and if from time to time some ‘sight’ of him is accorded, this will only be a glimmer granted by grace in what will always be a ‘cloud of unknowing’.⁵⁶³

Ecclesiology is not the task of looking *at* the church: for us, *in via* it is the task of looking *for* the church. The task of ecclesiology is to engage in a constant process of encountering the diversity of Christian belief and practice, exploring similarities, charting differences, tracing relationships and family resemblances, showing how different forms of Christian faithfulness can be imaginable to one another and, through this process, constantly re-thinking what it means to faithfully follow Christ in every age and place.

⁵⁶³ Basil Hume, *Searching for God* (Ampleforth: Ampleforth Abbey Press, 2001) 123.

Conclusion

Titles are dangerous things: they are too easily chosen. Once chosen, I began to have doubts: was it really appropriate to discuss what seemed, the more I looked at it, a rather naïve or *childish* question?⁵⁶⁴

This thesis began with the simple question, ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’ As a research question, at least, it seems rather naïve or childish – not a particularly good starting point for a doctoral thesis. Yet Nicholas Lash suggests that it may be the *job* of the theologian to address such childish questions. Small children, he notes, are not old and learned enough to be experts, nor have they experienced or suffered enough to be wise. Nevertheless, small children do ask fundamental questions as a matter of personal concern. Theologians, he adds, are usually elderly enough to have a measure of scholarly expertise and some of the wisdom that comes from experience and suffering. Yet Lash suggests that it is ‘part of the theologian’s responsibility, a function of his expertise and his measure of wisdom, to try to ask, and to help other people to ask, fundamental questions as a matter of personal concern.’⁵⁶⁵ ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’ may not be a *good* question, but it is a fundamental one, and it has been both asked and answered in this thesis as a matter of personal concern.

a) A fundamental question?

There are such things as fundamental theological questions, but we usually think of these as things like ‘Why do bad things happen to good people?’ and (especially for children) ‘Do pets go to heaven?’ The question I have addressed in this thesis does not seem to be one of them: ‘What’s ecclesiology about?’ is neither asked by children,

⁵⁶⁴ Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM, 1986) 3.

⁵⁶⁵ Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* 3.

nor worried about by adults. Yet this thesis has shown that the question really is fundamental, and that ecclesiology really is a matter of personal concern.

I have traced the rise of ecclesiology in late twentieth century theology from being a discrete sub-discipline of systematic theology to being the new fundamental theology. I have shown how, for many theologians in Europe and North America, ecclesiology has become the convergence point for a number of pressing concerns: concerns about secularisation and the justification of Christian truth claims, and concerns about the authority and power of the theologian, her place in the academy and her relationship to the church. Church-talk, which used to be a matter for slim volumes on history, sacraments, ecumenism and models of church, has broken its traditional disciplinary boundaries and become widespread, as theologians of all stripes appeal to the Christian community as the ground for their claims and the source and end of their reflection. In late twentieth century theology, the church is certainly a matter of personal concern to theologians.

I have also shown that this widespread turn to the church has caused the question, 'What's ecclesiology about?' to become fundamental. I have demonstrated that ecclesiology over the last thirty years has been engaged in an effort to redefine the object of ecclesiological inquiry and reshape the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. The result has been the rise of the methodological common sense I called *concrete ecclesiologies*, defined by their twofold conviction that the ordinary, sinful church of experience is worthy of theological attention, and that social science can help ecclesiologists attend to it.

In this thesis, I have explored concrete ecclesiologies' response to the question 'What is ecclesiology about?' in three ways: descriptive, critical and constructive. Looking back over these three strands of the thesis will help to draw out the significance of my argument for concrete ecclesiologies' development over the coming years.

b) Descriptive

I have described concrete ecclesiologies as a distinct theological genre for the first time. Twentieth century theology has turned to the concrete church to make claims about themes ranging from ethics to scriptural authority and the nature of Christian truth claims. I have argued that, while concrete ecclesiologies owe much to this wider turn, they should be regarded as a distinct genre because their object of inquiry and focus of interest is the concrete church itself. I have surveyed concrete ecclesiologies' characteristics and concerns and argued that these form a methodological common sense – a shared understanding of what ecclesiology should attend to, and how it should be undertaken. I have traced concrete ecclesiologies' roots in postliberal theology and post Vatican II Catholic theology, and have also shown how they arise in response to typically postmodern concerns about authority and power and the theologian's relationship with the church and the academy.

How might this descriptive work help concrete ecclesiologies develop? We have seen the diverse theological influences that converge to form concrete ecclesiologies. We have also seen that concrete ecclesiologies' engagement with social science arises not just from convictions about the nature of the church and the way it should be studied, but also from worries about the theologian's authority, the place of theology in the secular university and the place of the church in society at large. I have shown that

concrete ecclesiologies lack awareness of these theological and cultural influences. Their reluctance to spend a great deal of time ‘getting their thinking right’ about the church certainly helps them to avoid the theological stagnation that can accompany endless methodologising.⁵⁶⁶ Nevertheless, there is a balance to be struck between over-cautious methodologising and lack of reflexivity, and the argument of this thesis has suggested that concrete ecclesiologies have not yet got the balance right. I want to suggest that concrete ecclesiologies need to become more aware of the range of theological and cultural concerns that produce their ecclesiological common sense and then operate unacknowledged beneath its surface.

Increased reflexivity about their theological and cultural provenance will be important for concrete ecclesiologies’ development over the coming years for two reasons. Awareness of their *theological heritage* will help concrete ecclesiologies to negotiate the theological tensions underlying their project, and develop positive ways of moving beyond them – and I will say more about this below. Awareness of their *cultural context* will help concrete ecclesiologies to respond explicitly and positively to the challenges of doing theology in postmodernity. Becoming aware of the roots of their common sense need not entail concrete ecclesiologies becoming a self-consciously unified ‘movement’ in theology: I think their loosely shared common sense is a strength, rather than a weakness.⁵⁶⁷ In order to develop and flourish theologically, however, concrete ecclesiologies need to spend a bit more time ‘getting their thinking right’, and greater awareness of their theological and cultural provenance will help them do so.

⁵⁶⁶ Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life* 36.

⁵⁶⁷ I am thinking of Hans Frei’s caution, which I noted at the end of chapter one: ‘Very often, especially in theology, scholars start off from shared convictions, a “common sense” in the best sense of that term, shared views and a shared sensibility, and then relentlessly pursue some element in that amalgam, untying one knot after another, until at some point a common vocabulary and a shared sensibility turn into a technical, often esoteric special-school outlook.’ Frei, ‘Epilogue’ 276.

c) Critical

In my critical analysis, I have argued that concrete ecclesiologies' tendency to define themselves in opposition to modern ecclesiologies undermines their theological maturity. By expressing their methodological common sense in dichotomies like ideal/real, abstract/concrete and doctrinal/empirical, concrete ecclesiologies often end up working with impoverished understandings of ethnography and theology. I have shown how this oppositional way of thinking feeds into an understanding of the ecclesiological task as one of balancing the claims of two languages, theological and social scientific, about a single object, the church. Even as concrete ecclesiologies make promising attempts to break down the traditional impasse between theological and social scientific perspectives on the church, their view of theology and ethnography as functionally opposite and mutually regulating influences undermines their efforts, with the result that caricatured understandings of both disciplines go unchallenged. Concrete ecclesiologies' implicit response to postmodern worries about the connections between doctrine and hegemony compounds the problem, causing the doctrinal register of concrete ecclesiologies to be repressed.

While concrete ecclesiologies continue to define themselves in opposition to modern ecclesiologies and understand theology and ethnography as functional opposites, they will remain theologically underdeveloped. Their theological development will hang on two things. First, the concrete ecclesiological project needs to be developed and articulated in *positive* terms – focussing on what it *is* doing, rather than what it is not. The publications emerging from the Ecclesiology and Ethnography Research Network over the next few years will doubtless begin to articulate the concrete ecclesiological

project in more constructive and positive terms. Second – and perhaps more difficult – concrete ecclesiologies need to find ways of expressing how theology and ethnography relate that do not trade on a tacit understanding of the two disciplines as functional opposites. I have suggested that one possible way forward might be to draw out the similarities between the ways in which theology and ethnography relate to their objects of study. Exploring the ways in which both disciplines find their language and knowledge characterised and constrained by the living realities they seek to address might help us to see them not as functional opposites, but as potential partners in the development of a genuinely ‘negative’ ecclesiology.⁵⁶⁸

d) Constructive

As well as surveying and critiquing how concrete ecclesiologies answer the question, ‘What is ecclesiology about?’, I have also developed constructive suggestions for thinking about the nature of ecclesiology’s object of inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection. My constructive proposals for how we think about the object of ecclesiological inquiry and the purpose of ecclesiological reflection have picked up on the emphasis I noted in the introduction – the need to watch our language about the church, and remain aware that it is language in the presence of God. Accordingly, I have emphasised the ways in which our knowledge of the church is enabled and constrained by our position *in via*.

⁵⁶⁸ I have tentatively explored this possibility in Hawksley, “‘After my husband died...’: Ecclesiological Ethnography and the Hiddenness of God’, (Paper presented at the Being Surprised by God: Embodied Ecclesiology in Local Contexts Conference, Utrecht, 2010).

Taking my cue from pragmatic/relational anthropology, I have argued that our account of *what* the church is should be determined by *how* the church is known. I have drawn on Wittgenstein's work to argue that we should focus our theological attention on the ordinary ways in which we use the word 'church' and recognise churches. This led to a constructive proposal that we think of church as an analogical, or family resemblance concept: one that we explain by giving examples, rather than by defining essential characteristics. It also led to theological reflection on the practice of recognition itself, which I suggested gave us a helpful way of talking about how we discern and identify church. Finally, I have argued we should think of the purpose of ecclesiological reflection, not in terms of defining the church's essential characteristics, but in terms of *searching* for the church: exploring examples, drawing likenesses, showing tensions, and constantly striving to understand anew what it means to faithfully follow Christ.

What significance does this constructive work have for concrete ecclesiologies' ongoing development? The intention of my constructive work has not been to homogenise concrete ecclesiologies, and make sure they are all using social science in the same way, for the same theological reasons. Nevertheless, it is the theological implications of my critique of concrete ecclesiologies that I have chosen to pursue, rather than trying to work out a good field method or suggest methodological ways forward. This is partly an issue of time and space – any methodological proposals would have to be tested thoroughly in a fieldwork situation, and there has been no space for such an extended study here. It is also a more positive choice, however: I think the major work to be done in concrete ecclesiologies over the coming years will be theological, rather than methodological.

I want to suggest that concrete ecclesiologies' methodological moves indicate an incipient struggle into a new ecclesiological paradigm. 'New paradigm' is possibly too grand a way of putting it – I think what we are seeing is a struggle towards articulating a post-postliberal theological vision. I suggested in the introduction that ecclesiology needed new courage and new humility, and it is these characteristics that best describe the theological vision struggling to emerge here. The cultural context is the decline of the churches, and the incipient theological sense seems to be that humility requires the church to step back from blustering claims to social distinctiveness, but courage requires it to maintain its witness to the concrete possibility of a different life. The theological context is the shadow of twentieth century theology, and the incipient theological sense seems to want Barth's singular attention to the Word, but with 'hands', postliberalism's attention to practices, but without sectarianism, and Catholic theology's attention to experience, without making it the *norma normans non normata*. To what extent this incipient theological sense is 'out there', and to what extent it is my own sense of what needs to happen, is hard to tell. What I think we can be sure of is that concrete ecclesiologies' struggle with both the theological heritage of the twentieth century and the cultural challenges of the twenty-first century is largely taking methodological, rather than explicitly theological shape. I have argued that the doctrinal issues at stake here need to be discussed as such, and not treated solely as methodological issues. This is not to say that we must get our thinking about the church right first, after which we can proceed to discuss practical methodological matters; nor is it to say that methodological moves are not also theological ones. It *is* to say that if concrete ecclesiologies are to mature over the next few years, they will need to develop theological conversations as lively and engaged as their methodological ones. My constructive work in this thesis has been aimed at progressing that theological conversation a little further.

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